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The Heir Presumptive and the Heir Apparent.

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OF CARLINGFORD," "NEIGHBOURS ON THE GREEN,"
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CHAPTER XLVIII.

JOHN PARKE woke next morning to see his wife in her dressing-gown, moving vaguely about the room, a shadow against the full summer light that came in at all the windows. He could not make out at first what she was doing prowling about in a curious monotonous round from window to window, pausing to look out, as it seemed, at the edge of the blind, first of one, then of another. He watched her for a little while in vague alarm. During all this time a vague but painful suspicion was in John's mind. He knew better than any one how she had looked forward to a new state of affairs. Had she not drawn even him to that vile anticipation—to plan and calculate upon the boy's death? The pain of the thought that he had done so made more intense his sense of the terrible revulsion in her mind when all these horrible hopes came to an end. He was not a man who naturally divined what was going on in the minds of others, but the movement in his own, on this occasion, and the instinctive knowledge which long years of companionship had vaguely magnetically conveyed to him about his wife—not a matter of reflection or reason, but simply of impression—kept a dull light about Letitia which surrounded no other person upon earth. Something like sympathy mingled with and increased his power of comprehend-

ing during this dreadful crisis. How would she make up her mind to it? he asked himself, notwithstanding the horror and shame with which he thought of the calculations he himself had been seduced into sharing. He knew very well how little she liked to be foiled, how she struggled against disappointment, and got her will in defiance of every combination of circumstances. During all the previous day he had been very uneasy, certain that in her long absence she was planning something, wondering what she could plan that would have any effect upon the present state of affairs, fearing—he knew not what. John could not allow himself to think that his wife would contemplate harming the boy. Oh, no, no! such a thought was not in his mind. Letitia had her faults. She had never been kind to Mar. She had thought of him as an interloper, as an intruder, as supplanting Duke—and she had not concealed her feeling. But harm him—by so much as a touch? Oh, no! no! Nevertheless, John had been very uneasy all day, and even in his sleep this gnawing discomfort had not left him. He had dreamed of death-beds and dying persons, and of strange scenes of chaos in which she was always present, though he knew not for what purpose. And when he woke suddenly and saw her wandering about the room in the high clear morning light, like a ghost, all the uneasiness of the previous day, all the troubled dreams of the night came back upon his heart. He watched her for a minute without making any sign, and then he called, "Letitia!" His voice made her start violently—but she came towards him at once, wrapping her dressing-gown round her as though she felt cold.

"Isn't it very early? Why are you prowling about at this hour?"

"Yes, I suppose it's early. I couldn't sleep—one cannot always sleep when one would."

"You are not such a bad sleeper as you think," said John—as have said before him, in the calm of experience, the partners of many a restless wife and husband. "And I wish," he added impatiently, "that you'd let me sleep, at least."

Instead of quenching him by a sharp word, as was Letitia's wont, she came towards the bedside and sat down, turning her back to the light. "John," she said, "there has been a great deal happening while you have been asleep."

"What!" he cried. He raised himself up on his elbow, terri-

fied, threatening. "Letitia, for God's sake, don't tell me that anything has happened to the boy."

"Oh, the boy!" she cried, with an impatience that was balm to his heart. Then she went on, not looking at him, "Fancy who arrived last night—Mary, crying for her child——"

"Lady Frogmore!"

"Mary—and calling for her child—she who always denied that she ever had one. She came flying upon me in his room, and seized hold of me and dragged me out of it: mad—mad—as mad again—as—as a March hare." Her lips parted in a harsh laugh "I believe she would have torn me to pieces if I had not taken to my heels. You know there is nothing in the world I am so frightened of as madness—nothing! I took to my heels——"

"Wait a bit," said John, "wait; I don't understand. She came in the middle of the night to see her child?"

"Agnes must have put her up to it. Agnes must have got it into her head at last that she had a child."

"And you were in his room? What were you doing in his room, Letitia? You have never nursed him. You were asleep when I came upstairs."

She gave him a momentary glance—half of defiance, half of alarm—and yet she had thought of this too. "I fancied the nurse looked sleepy—the night nurse, you know, John—I thought she looked drowsy, and I stole back to listen. Well I did, for she was asleep. I went in to see that all was right for the night—his drink——"

Even Letitia's nerve was not enough for this. She shivered. "It is cold at this hour in the morning," she said, her teeth chattering.

"Did you give him anything to drink?" John would not have dared to confess to himself what dread apprehension went through his heart. And it was dreadful for him to talk of it, though she was so wonderful in self-command.

"I?—oh, no. I gave him nothing. I have not nursed him, you know. I saw that all was there that he could want, and was going to rouse the nurse, when somebody came upon me and took me by the shoulders. At first I thought it was you."

"Why should you think that I would take you by the shoulders?" His suspicion was not quenched, but seized upon every word.

"Yes," she said, "why should I? I thought, perhaps, you were angry with me for being there at all."

"Why should I be angry with you," he asked again, "for being there?" never taking his eyes from her face.

On her part she never looked towards him, but continued impatiently, "I don't suppose I thought of the whys and the wherefores. I thought it was you, that was all. And when I found it was Mary—I don't know whether she dragged me out or I pushed her out. Above all I feared a noise to wake the boy."

John gave her a long, searching look. He did not want to find her out. He wanted her to clear herself from all suspicions, from all doubts. "Ah, the boy!" he said, with a long-drawn breath, "the poor boy! Did you wake him? It might have been as much as his life was worth."

"You think of nothing else," she said. Then with a sort of indulgence to his weakness, "Your boy never stirred." She breathed forth heavily a sigh—was it of thankfulness? "I suppose he was sleeping," she added, with a sort of bravado; "I did not look."

"Good God!" cried John, springing up, "was there any doubt? Had you any doubt?" He seized his dressing-gown and thrust his arms into his sleeves, and his feet into slippers.

"Aye," cried Letitia, still without a movement, without even looking at him, "go and see. Nothing would make me face that woman again."

She sat idly playing with a ring upon her finger, turning it round and round, but neither raised her head nor looked at him though he paused before her with again the searching look of anxiety which he dared not define.

"Letitia," he said, "for God's sake what do you mean? There is something in all this I don't understand."

"Ah, don't I speak plain enough?" she said. "It's Mary come back, and as mad as a March hare."

"And you left her—a woman—in that state—alone with the boy, just out of the jaws of death? What's that on your gown?"

She looked at it, bending forward to see—a long streak as of something spilt. The stain was stiff, giving a rigid line to the stuff—and what John suspected, feared it to be, cannot be put into

words. His eyes grew wild with terror, and his voice hoarse, as he repeated :

"On your gown? What is it? what is it?"

"Oh, the milk!" Letitia said. It brought everything before her, and a shiver ran over her again; but also a laugh, which, though tuneless enough, gave the distracted man by her side some comfort, for she could not have laughed surely if it had been—"We spilt it between us," Letitia said, "and mad as she was she drew back for that, not to spoil her dress. She had her senses enough for that."

He stood in front of her for a moment, undecided what to do, when she suddenly raised her head and cried sharply, "John, why don't you go and see?"

"I can't understand you," he said. "You mean more than I know."

She looked up at him again and laughed in a way that froze his blood. "Don't I always?" she said, with a tone of contempt. Then added, stamping on the floor, "Go—go and see what has happened. I will never see that woman again."

John went softly along the corridor, half dressed, ashamed, miserable. Something had happened more than he could understand, perhaps more than he would ever understand. The house was all silent, wrapped as in a garment in the morning sunshine, which came in by the great staircase windows and flooded everything. It was still very early. His step made a sound which ran all through and through it. He could not be noiseless as the women were, who stole about, and met, and had their encounters, and nobody was ever the wiser. He thought it was in the middle of the night that this arrival must have occurred which seemed to him like a dream, and which, as he passed through the sleeping house and felt the stillness of it, he began to think must be but some wild fancy of his wife's, something which could not be true. When he pushed open the door of the ante-room a dark figure rose hurriedly out of a chair, and met him with a dazed look of a person disturbed and half asleep. "Miss Hill!" he cried. Then it was true!

She put up her hand and said "Hush." Then, after a moment, "He is asleep, like a baby; he has never stirred."

"Are you sure—that he is asleep?"

"Oh, I thought that myself," she cried, understanding him.

"He was so quiet. Yes, yes, he is asleep; breathing faintly, but you can hear him. Oh, safe and sound asleep!"

"My wife told me—his mother——"

"She is there," said Agnes, beckoning him to the door of the inner room. He stood and looked in for a moment, with his clouded and troubled face, leaning against the lintel. Mary's ear had been caught by the sound. She looked up and met his eyes with that ethereal clearness of countenance, the exaltation of her aroused and awakened soul. She looked him in the face with a mild serenity and peace, and smiled in recognition, then turned her eyes to the bed as if to show him the boy softly sleeping there. Behind, the nurse still slept in the easy chair. To John it seemed as if it were all a dream, of which there was no explanation. How did it come about that the sick room had passed into the keeping of these two, arriving mysteriously during the night, whom his wife must have risen from his side to receive, of whom he had heard nothing? The nurse asleep, all the usual faces gone, the mother who had disowned him sitting in that attitude of love by Mar's side—what did it all mean?

"This is all very strange," he said, drawing back from the door. "I find you here in possession whom I thought far away—and the mother who was so estranged. Did you come down from the skies? Is it safe to leave her there? Is she——"

Agnes looked at the man who was comparatively little known to her, who was a man, frightening and disturbing in his strange undress in the midst of the silent house. She was an elderly single woman, unaccustomed to give any account of herself to strange men, and her weariness and all the unusual circumstances told upon her. Her lips quivered and her eyes filled. "Oh," she said, "Mr. Parke, do not think we meant any—any reproach. Things have happened that have brought my sister to her full senses—and to remember everything. I could not keep her from her boy—you would not keep her from her boy——"

"Not if she is sane; not if it is safe," said John. He looked in again through the half-closed door. Once more Mary's keen ear caught the sound; and again she turned towards him her face, which was like the morning sky. She had never been beautiful in her best and youngest days. Now with her grey hair ruffled by the night's vigil, her mild eyes cleared from any film that had been upon them, lambent and inspired with watchful love, her

look overawed the anxious spectator. He stepped back again with a sort of apologetic humility. "I don't understand it," he said. "You seem to have some meaning among you that I don't know; but I cannot be the one to disturb her. I hope—I hope that I am making no mistake——"

"You are making no mistake, Mr. Parke," said Agnes. "Mar was my child more than hers; he was my baby. My heart was nearly broken, for I thought he was dying when I came here last night. But I trust him in his mother's hands. I give place to her because it is her right. Do you think I would leave my boy to her if she were not in her full senses, ready to defend him, ready to protect him——"

She stopped, choked with the sobs, which, in her great exhaustion and emotion, Agnes could no longer entirely keep down.

"To defend him—to protect him? From what? from what?" John said.

"Oh, how can I tell? From the perils and dangers of the night; from carelessness and any ill wish."

John's voice was choked as that of Agnes had been. "There is no ill wish," he said—"none—to Mar in this house."

He saw, as he spoke, the traces on the floor of something spilt like that on his wife's gown—and some fragments of broken glass which had escaped Agnes's scrutiny. He did not know what they meant. He was not clever, nor had he any imagination to divine; but something went through him like a cold blast, chilling him to the heart. He paused a moment, staring at the floor, and the words died away on his lips.

When John returned to his wife's room Letitia was in bed, and to all appearance fast asleep. The poor man was glad, if such a word could be applied to anything he was capable of feeling. He withdrew softly into his dressing-room, and sat there for a long time with his head in his hands and his face hidden. What to think of the mysterious things that had passed that night he did not know.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE sun was very bright on that July morning. When should it be bright if not in that crown of summer? It triumphed over all the vain attempts of curtains drawn and shutters closed to keep it out, and streamed in, in rays doubly intense for these precautions,

at every crevice. One of these resplendent rays fell upon the dress of the watcher who sat by Mar's bedside. When he opened his eyes first this was what caught them. The dress was not the black dress and white apron of the nurse. It was grey, of a soft silvery tone, with a pattern woven in the silk, and a satin sheen which caught the light. Mar, in the dreamy state of his weakness, admired it like a child. How soft the colour was, and the raised flowers which shone almost white in that wonderful ray of sunshine! His pleasure in it suited the dreamy state of feeble well-being in which he lay gradually getting awake. It seemed a kindness to put that pretty thing before him instead of the glare of the white apron on the gloom of the black gown. What was it, though, so near his bed?

He raised himself and beheld the most astonishing sight. Not the nurse at all with whose aspect he was so familiar, but a lady. Her face was shrouded by her hand, and for a moment he did not recognize her. A lady in those soft, beautiful robes, in an unfamiliar pose; not easy, like the accustomed nurse, who was so kind but not anxious. This figure leaned forward looking at him, intent upon him, though he could not at first make out her face. Then he perceived the grey hair curling over the hand which supported her head, and then—— He gave a little cry, "Ah!" which made her rise and come close to him. "Ah!" he said in his surprise; and then, with a curious, long drawn breath, "Am I dead?"

"Oh no, no."

"I know; not dead, for I'm living and talking, but I must have died, I suppose? And—and you too?"

She came up, closer and closer, and took his hand, and began to cry, clasping it within her own. "Why should that be? Why should that be?" she said.

"Because," said Mar, groping with his faint, half awakened senses and intelligence still in the strangest maze, "because—you are here."

"Do you know me?"

He did not answer, but in those large, humid eyes of weakness the answer was so plain. Know you! it seemed to say; what do I know but you? Mary was touched to the heart. She dropped upon her knees by the bedside, and began to kiss his hand over

and over. "I am your mother," she said, and went on repeating those words as if they were something which he would not believe. "I am your mother—I am your mother." They were a wonder to her, but no wonder to Mar. He smiled with the heavenly light in his eyes which belongs to all, more or less, who have come back from the gates of death; and specially to the children when they are so good, so good, as to come back. Was there ever any mother but was thankful, oh, beyond telling, to her child for coming back? He looked at her with that angelic superiority of the newly returned, saying nothing. What could he say? He had known it all his life, but had never said a word. He had thought of her, dreamed of her, longed for her, but never had said a word. Had he died it would have been without a sign of that paramount dream and longing. He had never had any sense of wrong, only of wistful wishes and a lingering, never-quenched, always visionary hope. When Mar had made up his mind, as he had done very early, many years before, that he would die, he had felt a consolation in his childish mind from the thought. God would surely let him attend upon her, be her guardian angel, though he was so little. And then when she should die too—ah, then! she would not fail to know him. It was this old childish thought so long cherished that made him think he must have died when he saw his mother for the first time by his bedside. But he was shy to utter that sacred word. He had dreamt of it so much, breathing it to himself like a melody which he alone had the secret of, that the thought of saying it aloud filled him with a strange trouble. And that she should kiss his hand, she! whose hem of her dress he would have been glad to kiss, troubled him; but to ask her to kiss him and not his hand, was something too bold, too hazardous to think of. He could only look at her, as he might have looked at the moment he had so often thought of, when he took her hand to lead her out of life, her guardian angel, and she recognized him in the light of heaven.

"I am your mother," she kept saying. "Do you know me, do you know me?" laying her cheek upon his hand, kissing every wasted finger. Mary did not wait for any answer, perhaps she did not want it. It was enough for her to make her statement clear to him, to show him who she was. She had no fear of his affection, nor any compunction as if for guilt of her own towards

him. None of these things troubled her mind. She was as if she had come home from a long absence, which by the most innocent natural causes had kept her separate from her boy. This was the way in which it seemed to affect her. She was not aware that she had been in fault or required forgiveness—or that there was any special harm or misfortune in it. She had arrived in time. That was the conviction warm at her heart. She had come in time. Her boy had been in danger, and she had arrived in time to save him. Had there been any sense in her mind of guilt towards him it would all have been driven away by this happy thought. She had been not a moment too late, exactly in time. Had she arrived earlier she might never have known the risk he ran, or the supreme need there was of her presence to protect him—and had she arrived late he might have been lost. She came by the providence of God exactly in time.

Agnes outside heard the murmur of the voices, and fearing, she knew not what, that her sister might say too much and disturb the equilibrium of the patient at so important a moment, came stealing into the room to prevent any overstrain of emotion. Poor Agnes had been the only mother Mar had ever known. All that he knew of maternal love and tenderness was from her, and he was to her the most cherished thing in the world, the apple of her eye. But when she came in thus upon the pair she was not welcome to either. She was a disturbing influence, a third party. They did not want her. This is so often the fate of the third that she was not surprised, but it cannot be said that she liked it. It requires a quite celestial knowledge of the heart and charity for all its waywardness to enable one to see one's self set aside and another preferred who has not done half so much to deserve that preference. Mar indeed hailed her more openly than he had done his mother, holding out his disengaged hand to her, drawing her nearer; but it was more as a witness of his blessedness than as the cause of any part of it. And Mary got up from her knees as her sister came in, as if now the intimate things of the heart must be put away, and the ordinary ones attended to. She bent over the bed and kissed his cheek, and then she returned to the cares of the nursing, which all this time had been laid aside.

"The question now is what we should give him," said Mary. "He must want something. It would have been wrong to dis-

turb him in that beautiful sleep, but now that he is awake he must have something. What shall we do? Go down and forage for him, or wake this poor woman, who will be ready to kill herself——”

“I cannot be sorry for her,” said Agnes, “to sleep all through the night when she could not know how much she might be wanted.”

“It is not her fault; and it will be dreadful for her when she knows. Do you think his eyes will bear a little more light? Do you feel the light upon your eyes, my dear boy? Open that window there where it will shine upon him. Ah,” Mary cried, turning round upon the nurse, who began to move and stir. Mar felt less shy when his mother’s eyes were not upon him. He was able to take a little timid initiative of his own. He put his two thin hands upon hers, which was so soft and white and round. How soft it was to touch, a hand like velvet; no, a hand much softer than any vulgar image—like a mother’s hand, and no less; and drawing it towards him by degrees shyly, yet with increasing boldness, got it to his pillow and laid his cheek upon it, holding it there as sometimes an infant will do. Mary withdrew her eyes from the woman, who was slowly coming to herself. She looked at her boy, pillowing his head upon her hand with that gracious infantile movement, and a tender delight filled her heart. With her disengaged hand she pulled her sister’s sleeve, and attracted her attention. Mar gave them both a look of blessedness in his ecstasy of weakness and satisfaction, and then closed his eyes and lay as if he slept, his cheek upon that softest of pillows, and happiness in his heart. Agnes stood by and looked on, the old maid, the grim old spinster (as young men had been known to call her), with a pang which was almost insupportable, made up of pain and of pleasure. Ah, more than pleasure and more than pain—the bliss of heaven to see them thus restored to each other, and all the claims of nature set right; and yet, for she was but human, a sharp stab like a knife to see how little a part she herself had in it. She who alone had been Mar’s mother, who had worshipped the boy—and was nothing to him. This keen cut forced a tear into the corner of each eye, which it filled and through which she saw everything, a medium which enlarged and softened, yet somewhat blurred, the picture which was so full of consolation.

At this moment the nurse sprang to her feet with a cry. She said, "Where am I? What has happened?" and then with a wild outcry, subdued but shrill with misery, added, "I have been asleep. Oh, God forgive me, I have been asleep."

"There is no harm done," said Agnes coldly, advancing a step and almost glad there was some one she could be harsh to, without wrong; "his mother has been with him all the night."

"Oh, God forgive me," said the nurse. "Oh, what will become of me—I have slept all through the night!"

"It is very true," said Mary, with her voice which was soft with great happiness; "but I don't think it is your fault. Say nothing, and we will say nothing. I have been here in your place."

"Bestir yourself now," said Agnes, "and tell us what he ought to have."

"Oh, ladies," said the unfortunate, "I never did such a thing before—never—never! You may not believe me, but it is true; and if he is the worse for it, oh, goodness, it will kill me! What shall I do? What shall I do?" She came forward to the bedside wringing her hands. Her mob cap had been pushed to one side in her sleep—an air of dissipation, of having been up all night, such as never comes to the dutiful watcher, was in her whole appearance. Tears were dropping upon her white apron, making long streaks, where they fell with a splash like rain. Mar, with his cheek pillowed on his mother's hand, opened his eyes and looked at her. And there came into the too large, too lustrous eyes of the sick boy a light that had not been in them for long, that had been rare in them at any time—the light of laughter. It was almost cruel that he should be aroused, but he was so. He raised his head a little and laughed. "She looks so funny," he said, under his breath. It was very good for Mar to be brought down from the superlative in this casual way by a laugh.

"Bless the boy," said Mary; "do you hear him laugh? And bless you for making him laugh, you poor soul. He is none the worse; he has slept all the time. But make haste now, and tell us what has to be done for him; what is he to take? She is dazed still; she has not got back her senses."

"Where is the milk? Was there no milk for him? I am sure," cried the nurse, "I put it here last night."

Mary looked at Agnes; and Agnes, with a terrified glance, at her. Was it true?

"Go," said Miss Hill quietly; "don't waste a moment now, and get him some fresh. Let nobody touch it. I will go with you myself," she cried, after a moment, taking the woman by the arm. Was it true? Was it true?

"Oh," said the nurse, "don't think I'm like that. It never happened before—oh, never, never! No case of mine was ever neglected. Oh, ask the Sisters at the hospital. Ask the doctors! I could die with shame—I, that always bragged I was never sleepy. And why should I be sleepy, after getting my good rest?"

"How do you account for it?" said Agnes, still stern.

They were going down the great staircase together in the full flush of morning light.

"I don't know how to account for it. Mrs. Parke brought me something which she said was restoring in case I had a hard night. I never have taken anything; but she seemed so kind, and, perhaps, she didn't know. I thought I oughtn't to take it, but she seemed so kind. Oh, madam, don't think badly of me. I'll go back to the hospital to-day and send another. Nurse Newman or Nurse Sandown, or any of them that I looked down upon, would be better than me."

Agnes bade her dry her eyes and put her cap straight. "There is no harm done, and nothing shall be said. But you must learn a lesson from what has happened." Her own voice sounded harsh and unfeeling to Agnes as she spoke. She would have liked to be angry, to pour out some of the pain in her heart in indignation and reproach. Could it be true, then? No dream of Mary's, but dreadful truth. She went down with the wondering woman all the way to the dairy, where a pail of foaming milk had just been brought in, and took some of it herself back to the sick-room. So far as this went they were safe, but for all the rest what was to be done? Agnes went a great deal further than Mary in her panic and horror! Could they venture to give him anything, even a glass of water, in a house where such a thing had been done—if, indeed, it was true and not a dream?

"We must get him out of the house," she said. "We must take him home. I brought this myself from the dairy, where it had been brought straight from the cow. I drank some to test it. We must get him away. We must take him home."

"But he is not able to go. It will be many a day yet before he can even leave his bed."

"Then God be praised!" cried Agnes in her excitement, "I can cook. We could both do that in the old days. Everything he takes must be prepared here. We will take him into our own hands."

Mary grew pale with the contagion of her sister's excitement. "Do you think," she said in a terrified whisper, "that she will try such a dreadful thing again?"

"Those who do it once may do it a hundred times," said Agnes, with the solemnity of a popular belief. "I feel as if I were living in an enemy's camp; but you and I will save the boy."

CHAPTER L.

WHEN Letty came stealing into the ante-room as soon as she was up, which was between seven and eight in the morning, she was received by Miss Hill with a stern countenance, to the double surprise of the anxious girl, who did not know she was in the house, nor that the kind Aunt Agnes, in whom she had claimed a share for years, could look forbidding.

"Oh, you are here!" Letty said, with a little shriek of pleasure. "He will get all right now you are here."

"Why should he get well now I am here?" cried Agnes, with a gloom of suspicion which Letty did not understand. "Was there anything wrong?"

The girl echoed the "wrong!" with a wondering face. "The nurses were very, very kind," she said, "but one wants to have somebody one is fond of. They would not let me be here."

"Are you fond of him?"

"I—oh," said Letty, with a flush of generous feeling, "how can you ask me that? Fond of Mar? Duke and I and Tiny would die for Mar—if that would do him any good."

"I think you are true," said Agnes meditatively; "you're too young to be in any plot. Then you can help me, Letty. You must have everything brought up here—the meat for his beef tea

even the water, fresh drawn. You must see to it yourself. I am going to prepare everything for him myself here."

Letty promised with enthusiasm. She was so anxious to do something that the commission delighted her for the first moment. Then she began to reflect involuntarily. "But why? Oh, I'm afraid cook will be dreadfully offended. She thinks so much of her beef tea. Doesn't he like it? Did nurse say anything——"

"I wish to prepare everything here," said Agnes, in the stern tone which was so new to her, and Letty, much troubled and cast down, stole away. She was hardly gone when the other nurse appeared, fresh and neat, from her night's sleep. "Have you had a good night?" she said; "and how is——" She started and drew back at the sight of the stranger. "Has anything happened?" she said.

"Only that his mother is with the patient, and I am his aunt. We will take charge of him in future," said Agnes stiffly. There were aspects in which she was a grim old spinster, as the young men said.

The nurse stared, the cheerful nurse, who had always hoped, always believed in the boy's recovery. Agnes knew no difference between the woman who had slept all the night, and this bright daylight creature who had served him like a sister. She had been busy collecting what things she should want, preparing for the charge she had taken upon her when the nurse entered the room, and now went on with these preparations calmly, putting coals upon the fire and collecting the glasses and dishes which had been used to be carried away.

"You are making a large fire for such a warm day," said the nurse in her astonishment.

"I shall want it," said Agnes curtly.

"Let me do that. It is my business—and there is no hurry. I must first see my patient——"

"Nurse, I mean no discourtesy to you—but he is our patient now. His mother and I have taken the nursing into our own hands."

The nurse started in consternation. "Does Mrs. Parke know?" she asked, helpless in the extremity of her surprise.

"Mrs. Parke has little to do with it. His mother, Lady Frogmore, is with him, and I am here to help her. We wish to do everything ourselves."

"But——" gasped the nurse. She added after a moment, "You are dissatisfied with the nursing——"

It was a struggle with Agnes not to bring forward the failure of the other nurse; but she was honourable and just, and shut her mouth close unless she should betray her. "I cannot say that," she said, "for we have not been here. It is only natural that his mother—— and then I prefer to prepare everything for him myself."

"To prepare everything! You must think, then, there is some reason—— Oh, here is Mr. Parke!"

That was a wonder, too; for John Parke was not an early man. And he was very pale, and looked as if he too had been up all night. As a matter of fact it was so many hours since he had been there before in the glow of the summer night which was morning, yet too early for any one to be astir, that it seemed to him, as to Agnes, as if the day were already far spent. He came in looking as he had done when their anxiety was the deepest, with a cloud upon his face, and his hands deep in his pockets. "You will take your orders from Miss Hill, nurse," he said, "and Lady Frogmore. It is natural that his mother—— and my wife will not, I think, come downstairs to-day. She is asleep now, but she has had a bad night."

"I am afraid, sir," said the nurse, "Mrs. Parke has been doing too much."

John Parke gave Agnes a troubled, alarmed, inquiring look, yet with a menace in his eyes as if to silence her. "Probably it's that," he said. And then, presently, after a pause, "It couldn't be the fever. It's not contagious? At least that's what you people say."

"It's not contagious; but several attacks sometimes come on in one house. May I go and see Mrs. Parke?"

"We'll wait a little," said John; "we'll wait till the doctor comes. She is a little confused in her head." He fixed his eyes upon Agnes with a great deal of meaning. "I scarcely think she knew what she was doing——last night."

These were words that seemed so charged with meaning as to affect the air differently from other words. There seemed a little thrill in the atmosphere when they were said. And the pause that came after them was not like other pauses. There was a vibration in it of mystery and terror. And yet there was not

one of the little group who quite understood what it meant. Agnes was in all the excitement of an incident which she was not at all sure was true, while John had nothing but a horrible doubt in his mind, and did not know what it was he feared. And the nurse knew nothing at all, but yet divined something perhaps more terrible than reality, if there was any reality at all. What was the mistress of the house doing last night, for which her husband gloomily said that she was not responsible? But this no one dared to say.

Mary came out at this moment from the inner room. There was nothing in her of either horror or mystery. Her grey hair was a little disordered, curling in stray locks over the black veil which she had tied upon her head; her complexion quite fresh, with its soft rose-tint unaffected by the night's vigil; and her eyes full of light. Lady Frogmore had always possessed pretty eyes, they were the chief beauty of her face; not very bright, but always softly shining and luminous. For many years there had been, save on remarkable occasions, a sort of veil over them, a look as if they were turned inward. Now they were fully aglow, lit like two stars with a lambent quivering light. A look of supreme satisfaction and content was upon her face.

"He has taken his drink," she said, "and gone to sleep again, like a baby. He will probably now have a long sleep. Sleep is better for him than anything. John, we invaded your house like a couple of thieves after dark. I had not time to ask for you or anything. I came upstairs at once, knowing I was wanted, and arrived here—just in time."

"What do you mean by arriving just in time?" said John Parke, with an awful shadow coming over his face.

"I mean," said Mary with a soft little laugh, "neither too early nor too late—just when I was wanted; and if you ask me how I knew that I was wanted I could not tell you. These things are mysterious. I came just at the moment."

What moment? There was a curdling in the blood of the spectators, but none in Mary. All the horror had died away; she could think of nothing but the opportuneness of her own arrival. Perhaps she had forgotten even what it was which she had stopped "in time."

After that extraordinary thrill of silence John Parke spoke

again in a voice which quivered strangely. "I came to tell you," he said, "that Letitia is ill."

"Ah!" said Mary. And she added gravely, "I do not wonder," with sudden seriousness; but there was nothing more in her gentle countenance; no anger, no fear.

The nurse, who was the least enlightened of all, yet the most eager, the most full of surmises, said with anxiety, yet timidity, "Mrs. Parke has been so anxious. She has taken so much out of herself."

"Yes, I am afraid she has been very anxious," said Mary, still with that mild, yet strange, seriousness. "It was, perhaps, very natural—in the circumstances."

"She was afraid lest anything should be neglected, and so anxious for every help that could be thought of—everything that the doctor or we could suggest."

The others listened silently to this plea. Nobody spoke. If Mary remembered what had happened, or if she consciously and willingly put it out of her mind, nobody could tell. She nodded her head several times in silent assent. Then she spoke, her companions all listening as if to the voice of fate.

"I understand that," she said; "and then at the very last—it was the overstrain at the last."

What did she mean? Even Agnes asked herself this question, wondering over again whether it was all a dream, or whether it was true. John Parke stood amid the group of women, with his heart as heavy as lead, his ears keen to hear any word that could throw light on the mystery. But none came. Was there any mystery at all? Was it a mere encounter between the mother who was happy, and the mother who was (God forgive her!) disappointed—but no more? He stood for some minutes, waiting, terrified, yet eager to hear—and then unsatisfied, yet painfully relieved, as if he had escaped a sentence of death, walked away.

The doctor came afterwards and pronounced the highest panegyric upon Mar. He had done exactly what it was best and wisest for him to do. He had slept, he had swallowed obediently all that was given him, and gone to sleep again. There now remained nothing for him but to be promoted to the disused practices of eating, and to go on. Dr. Barker, like an elated and successful practitioner, who is aware that great

honour and glory would result to himself from the happy issue of this difficult case, freely applauded everybody, even the melancholy culprit, who was a woman of the keenest conscience, and could scarcely be kept from denouncing herself. The nurses, he said, were half the battle, and he had been most ably seconded. And he was ready even to agree, without the faintest idea of her meaning or any curiosity on the subject, in Mary's happy assertion that she had arrived "just in time." "Precisely," the doctor said, "just when your appearance was the most invaluable stimulant—just when he was able to profit by it. I agree with you entirely, Lady Frogmore; you came in the nick of time."

It was considered very strange in the house, accustomed to appeal to the doctor in these constant visits of his if a finger ached, that he did not see Mrs. Parke that day. John expected that she was asleep, and that it was possible she might be quite well when she awoke, and Dr. Barker left the house thinking that there were too many women about, and that they were an excitable lot, as women usually were, making as much fuss about that boy as if his getting well were a miracle; whereas he (Dr. Barker) had always been certain, with proper care, that the boy would get well. He was not a pessimist, but always ready to think the best. And, indeed, Dr. Barker, though he did not fail to dwell upon Mar's recovery as a wonderful proof of what science could do ("for we had no constitution to work upon—no constitution, and everything against us"), dismissed the boy otherwise from his mind and fixed his thoughts wonderingly upon Mary, who seemed to have come out of her hallucination or mania, or whatever it was, at a moment's notice in the most astonishing way. It was as if she had always been there, always anxious about him, caring for him. And Dr. Barker smiled at her idea that she was just in time. He had observed it though he had not said anything, and put it down in a mental note-book as a curious evidence of the delusions which still linger in a mind that once has been off its balance. Mary had made an immense advance by recognizing her boy, and this mild little extravagance of thinking she had come "just in time"—poor thing! showed how the wind was blowing; how her mind had been affected by the supposed imminence of a crisis. He put it down in his mind as a thing to note, when other patients were similarly affected. The reader knows that the doctor was wrong; but so are a great

many, both doctors and other wise people, who take the reverberation of an accidental fact for the foundation of an all-embracing theory—from which many strange things sometimes arrive.

Agnes Hill enacted what she herself came to think afterwards a somewhat ridiculous part for the rest of this day. She had everything that could be wanted for the sick-room brought upstairs in what may be called a rude form; pieces of beef and kettles of water destined to make Mar's beef tea, and everything else that could be thought of, so that the ante-room resembled an amateur kitchen, filled with a score of things that could be made no use of, and which the indignant cook sent up in quantities, lest the ladies should want anything. A fire sufficient to cook by in the height of summer is not a comfortable thing. And still less was the condition of mind comfortable in which Miss Hill sat watching, afraid to rest or to admit any alleviation, tolerating with difficulty the presence of the nurse, who, deeply interested and curious, addressed all her faculties to the task of finding out what was meant by these precautions. The food that had been sent up from the kitchen had been very dainty; it could not be because of any imperfection in that; and the nurse smiled at the thought that she could be supposed to have been careless in the warming or preparation of anything. What then was the meaning of it? When her colleague in her agony of compunction confided the story of her dreadful failure, of the sleep that had lasted all night, and the cordial that had presumably caused it, a strange gleam of light came into the mystery. Mrs. Parke had been in the sick-room when the night nurse had fallen asleep, and when she awoke in the morning Lady Frogmore was there, and Lady Frogmore had asserted again and again that she had arrived "just in time." It seemed a wonderful gleam of light, yet on the whole it did not reveal much. What had happened, what Mrs. Parke had done, what Lady Frogmore had found, what had taken place while the legitimate guardian slept, could only be guessed, and dimly guessed. The nurse formed a theory in her own mind not further from the truth than a theory unattended by actual foundations of fact usually is—much more the truth than Dr. Barker's conclusion as to the rags of delusion which remain in the mind when its greater trouble is gone. But it was a theory which Nurse Congreve of the Ridding Hospital kept closely to herself. A nurse, like a doctor, sees many strange

chapters of family history—and among them this was the most strange ; but that was all that could be said.

The most curious thing was that before the day was half over, Lady Frogmore, coming into the ante-room and finding it impossible to rest there as she had intended, on account of the dreadful heat, suddenly fell into a fit of suppressed laughter at her sister's *batterie de cuisine*, and laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

"What is all that for?" she said. "And do you think, Agnes, that you can make things for him better than the cook?"

Miss Hill gave her sister a look full of reproach, but Lady Frogmore still laughed.

"The cook is a *cordon bleu*, and you will be melted away before that fire."

"Mary!" said Agnes in a tone which meant a hundred things.

But before the time came, which was very soon, when Mar was allowed his first chicken, even Agnes's resolution had broken down, and she began to be uncomfortably conscious that to this almost tragedy there was a ludicrous side. Lady Frogmore was the wonder of wonders during all this time. She was never tired, went without sleep night after night, and only looked the brighter in the morning ; every cloud departed from her serene countenance, her eyes were lighted up with love and joy. To hear her say "my boy" was like listening to a song of triumph. It was she who shielded the night nurse from herself, and sent daily messages of inquiry about Letitia. When a day or two had elapsed she made no further mention of having arrived in time. Every appearance of having been injured, or terrified, or threatened, died out of her face. She became as she had been in the old days when she first came to the Park as Lady Frogmore, but more assured, more self-possessed, like a woman above the reach of fate.

Meanwhile the centre of interest changed in the house. It was Letitia's room which was occupied by the nurses, shadowed from the sunshine and daylight, and filled with anxious cares. The half of the county was aroused by the news that Mrs. Parke, in her devotion to her nephew, and constant attendance upon him, had contracted the same fever, and now lay between life and death.

CHAPTER LI.

THE condition of mind of Mrs. John Parke when she escaped from the hands of Lady Frogmore was one which no words of mine could describe. And yet her excitement was scarcely greater than it had been during all that day. The extraordinary and awful discovery of the morning, that Mar was not going to die, that all her hopes were fallacious, and she and her children doomed to insignificance for ever, had so unsettled her mind, which was fixed in a contrary idea, that in the storm and passion which possessed her soul she was scarcely responsible for her actions. To say this is a long way from saying that she was mad, and not responsible for her actions at all. Letitia was mad with passion, with contradiction, with the dreadful destruction of all her dreams; and when there came whirling into her soul like a burning arrow the horrible suggestion that was murder she did not seem to have leisure or power to think of it, to consider it, much more to reject it and cast it out of her, but only to feel keenly penetrated by it, transfixed, so that the mad confusion became more terrible still, and the writhing of her spirit more convulsive from this painful dart, which went through and through her. She seemed to obey some command that had been given to her when she went with what seemed premeditation to the shop in the street of the little town where she had gone to call on her friend. There was no time to think, only to do. All the evening she was in this hurried, breathless state. She had to sit down at the dinner table, to answer questions, to talk and look like her usual self; and then when she escaped upstairs, pretending she was tired, there was still no time to think. She gave the nurse the potion, not sure whether that was not the thing that would destroy, while the other emptied into the innocent milk was nothing at all, a mere restorative. She did not know which was which. What did it matter? There was no time to think. Thus when Mary seized her it was but the climax of a miserable day, a day which had been all one rush from morning till night.

And then the stuff was spilt between them. It was a good thing the stuff was spilt—all spilt and useless on the floor, except a little which went upon her dressing-gown. Milk makes a stiff mark, hardens the stuff it stains, as if it were blood. Mary

jumped back to save her grey gown. Oh, she did not mean to have her grey silk spoilt whatever happened, which was so like Mary. And then Letitia had got away. Nobody had seen it one way or the other, or knew anything about it except Mary. And what was there to know? Nothing! The stuff was spilt; there was nothing—nothing! She had done no harm—absolutely no harm. What was there to know? On the whole it had relieved her heart and her breathing when the stuff was spilt; she would not have liked to drink it as Mary had tried to make her. No; she would not have drunk it; but when it was spilt, that was all right again. The only thing she regretted was that it did not splash up upon Mary's gown. She would have liked to spoil that Quakerish dress. It would have been a satisfaction. And she did not meet a creature as she went back to her room. John was not there. Nobody need know that she had ever been out of it. To be sure there were Mary and Agnes; but they would not say anything. It was all one; Mar must live, and all her hopes must die; but at all events no one could say that she had harmed him. Never, never! she had not harmed him. She was even capable of falling asleep in her exhaustion and had a succession of dreams or dozes. She did not know what was going on till it was light, till the morning had begun, and then she jumped up and went and looked out at the sky, feverishly anxious to know whether it was fine or whether it rained, though this was of no importance to any one; and then she had sent John to Mary, thinking it best to have the catastrophe over whatever it should be, and then went to bed again and fell asleep, deep asleep, lying like a log through all those brilliant morning hours.

Who it was who said first that Letitia had the fever, that she had caught it in her devotion to her nephew, no one ever knew. It was the kind of rumour which rises by itself. She was ill and in bed, and what so natural as that the fever, which is always popularly believed to be contagious, whatever the instructed may say, should have seized another victim? The housemaids were extremely nervous whether they might not themselves be the next to be stricken, and half the county sent to inquire with a depth of interest which was intensified by the fact that Mrs. John Parke had not been up to this time a popular woman. The ladies in the neighbourhood said to each other that they had done her injustice, that they never had supposed her capable of such

devotion, and sent their grooms to inquire with even greater interest than they had shown for young Lord Frogmore ; and whenever John was met he was overwhelmed with inquiries and bidden to keep up his spirits and hope the best, for if young Frogmore, so delicate a boy, had recovered, why not Mrs. Parke ? John, everybody said, looked ten years older, and that too was a revelation to his neighbours ; for it had never been supposed that he was so sensitive or so romantically attached to his wife that even a possibility of danger to her should move him so much. Dr. Barker, it was remarked, did not look by any means so grave. He said brusquely that she would do very well, that it was not nearly so bad a case as that of Lord Frogmore, and his visits were much less frequent than they had been during Mar's illness. But even with all the superior sources of information which we possess it is difficult to tell at what time it entered into Letitia's mind that it would be a good thing to have the fever. She was capable of no such thought at first when she awoke from that heavy sleep of exhaustion, and found her husband waiting for her awakening, waiting to question her, to catch her off her guard, to discover the meaning that had been in Mary's words. But Letitia's first glance at John's face had put her on her guard. She had awakened refreshed and strengthened by the consciousness, which felt like superior virtue, that Mar had taken no harm ; and all her forces rallied to answer John, to bewilder and beguile him. His face was full of perplexity ; he had got no light on what had happened, and every nerve must be strained, Letitia felt, to settle the question now and for ever. She answered with a skill and coolness which would have been the admiration of any lawyer in his heavy cross-examination. He was not clever, poor fellow ; he did not know what questions to ask ; he asked the same questions again and again. He continued to show his own troubled thoughts, and the vague dread in his mind, rather than to get any light upon the mystery. But though she was so clever and he so much the reverse, it soon became apparent to Letitia that for the first time he was not convinced by the most specious explanations. She told him a story which fitted well enough and made it all clear. There was no joints in her armour, nothing at least of which he could take advantage—it was all quite coherent, hanging together. There was not a word to be said against it. But John was not convinced, the cloud did not lift from his face.

Instead of the look of confidence he was wont to give her, the "Ah, now I see what you mean," which had so often been the reward of Letitia's explanations, he sat heavily, staring at her, and found nothing to say. He could not object to anything, but he was not convinced. It was a new thing in their life. Perhaps it was then, in the evening of that day, when her own excitement had calmed down, when she had succeeded in repeating to herself as a thing that had been almost beyond hoping for, the highest testimony to her own virtues, that Mar had taken no harm, that the idea of having the fever came into Letitia's busy brain. All this excitement had told upon her, and the terrible shock of last night, which, to do her justice, was as much caused by the dreadful sensation of having done that terrible thing as of having been found out. She was not well. She found with satisfaction that her pulse was high and her breathing quick. She was feverish and excited, her whole being conscious of the tremendous crisis through which she had passed. And to meet Mary was beyond even Letitia's power. She was able for many things, but she did not feel herself able for that. It seemed to her that to remain in bed under any plausible pretext, to lie there at her ease, and repose herself, would be the greatest comfort she could think of. Her head did ache, her pulse was quick, the agitation which had not subsided in her mind counterfeited not badly the bodily agitation of fever. It was enough to deceive the nurse, who came to her reluctantly, but whom she soon subdued to her service, and if it did not subdue Dr. Barker it was enough to make him consent to her assumption. It was herself who suggested gradually and with caution that she had caught it from young Frogmore. She said, "Let no one come near me. You all say there is nothing contagious in it; but how can I have got it but from Mar? Therefore, keep the children away from me; keep the servants out of the room. No one must run any risk for me."

"Mamma, mamma," cried Letty, at the locked door, "let me come in. I must come in and help to nurse you."

Letitia smiled with a pathetic look which altogether overcame the nurse. She went to the door and addressed the applicant outside. "Miss Letty, your dear mamma will not allow me to let you in. She says, seeing she has caught it from Lord Frogmore, you might catch it too—and you must not come in."

"Oh, what do I care for catching it!" cried Letty, beating upon the door. "Let me in, let me come in!"

But Letitia was inexorable. John was allowed to come in, morning and evening. John, who never got free from that cloud on his face, who stood at a little distance from the bed, and looked at his wife while he asked his little formula of questions. "If she had had a good night—how her pulse was—what the doctor thought." He was anxious and unfailing in his visits, but the cloud never departed from his face. Not even the fact that she had taken the fever convinced John. It softened him, indeed, and mingled pity with the painful perplexity in which his mind was left, which was something in her favour; but it was not enough to restore the confidence which was lost.

Thus the great house presented a very curious spectacle with its two centres of illness—on one side full of brightness and hope, on the other of dark and troublous thoughts. Mar was recovering moment by moment; they could see him getting better—thriving, brightening, expanding like a flower. And the room, in which Agnes no longer attempted to cook for him, was full of the cheerfullest voices, to which his young tremulous bass—for his boyish voice had broken, and was now portentously mannish and deep, notwithstanding his weakness—would respond now and then with a happy word, which Letty and Tiny received with delight and admiration, accepting even his jokes with acclamation in their gratitude to him for getting well. They told each other stories now of the dreadful time of his illness, and especially of that day when they had given up hope, which was the day on which Agnes had received her letter, the day which preceded the change, which had been so wonderful a change in many ways. "But I never gave up hope," cried Tiny, "neither I nor nurse." "Oh," cried Letty, "you shut yourself up all the morning in your room. You would do no lessons nor anything; and when I went to your door to call you, you could not hear me, for you were sobbing as if your heart would break; and nurse, though she always said there was hope, cried when she said it." "I cried because I could not help it, but I always believed he would get better," said the nurse. It was the cheerful nurse, she who had always hoped, who still kept partial charge of Mar, while the other one who had fallen asleep on that eventful night had gone to Mrs. Parke. This conflict of eager voices touched and amused

the two ladies, who had no thought in the world but how to humour and please and strengthen Mar. Mary laid her hand on Tiny's shoulder, and said to her sister, "It must be this child, for the other is too old." For what was it that Letty at nineteen was too old? But Agnes was not so easily moved. She shook her head a little. She loved the children; but Letitia's blood was in their veins, and who could tell when or how it might come out?

And the curious thing was that between Lady Frogmore and her son there was such a perfect understanding and union, as mother and child who had been all in all to each other do not always reach. Mary's mind had never been disturbed by fears that her boy might reject her tardy love, or might have been alienated from her. It was part of the change that her illness and permanent confusion of mind had wrought in her. She who had been so humble was now troubled with no doubts of herself. From the moment when the cloud had rolled away a soft and full sunshine of revival and certainty had come into Mary's mind. She had not felt herself guilty towards her boy, and she had never doubted that his heart would meet hers with all the warmth of nature. It was as if she had come home from a long involuntary absence. Had she ever forgotten him, put him aside, shrank from the sight of him? She did not believe it, or rather she never thought of it, rejecting every such thought and image. She never called him by the name of Mar as the others did. Some painful association, she could not tell what, was in the name. She called him, "my boy," in a voice which was like that of a dove, and then with a firmer tone, "Frogmore." "It is time," she said, "that he bore his father's name." And she made no allusion to the past, never a word to show that she remembered the long years of separation. Even in her conversation with her sister, when they were alone together, Mary altogether avoided the subject. To say that Agnes did not try to fathom the extraordinary change and make out how it was that such a revolution should be possible would be to suppose her strangely unlike the rest of the human race. Her mind was full of curiosity and wonder, but it was never satisfied. Lady Frogmore never seemed to remember that things had been different in the past. She spoke of Frogmore's room at the Dower House, as if there had always been such a room. "I think we must have all the furniture

renewed," she said; "he wants a man's surroundings now. He must have new bookcases and room for all his things." Agnes was so over-awed by her sister's steadfast ignoring of all that was different in the past that she did not even dare to ask which was Frogmore's room. She had to divine which room was meant, and to carry out her orders without a question more.

CHAPTER LII.

"I AM very glad," said the man of business, "to hear that everything has gone so well." He gave John a somewhat curious look from under his eyelids. He did not doubt the honest meaning of his co-trustee; but that there should have been for so long before Mr. Parke's eyes the prospect of such a change—the almost certainty that the delicate boy would die, and title, wealth, and importance—every advancement he had ever dreamed—should come to him, and then in a moment that the whole brilliant prospect should be wiped out, and himself and his children thrust back in the shade, was an ordeal which would try the best. It was impossible but that the thought of it must have entered John's mind. He must have felt himself again heir presumptive; he must have believed that a few hours would restore to him all and more that he had lost. And then all had disappeared again, and by an event at which John must pronounce himself glad. It was a severe trial for any man. Mr. Blotting attributed to this the cloud upon John Parke's face, and was sorry, but could not blame him. It was but too natural that he should feel so. His wife's illness, too, the astute man of business could easily enough conceive to spring from the same cause. She, no doubt, had felt it still more keenly than John had done. He had seen the doctor, and was aware that Dr. Barker did not treat Mrs. Parke's fever as very serious; and the lawyer had his own ideas of human nature, which seemed to him to account for many things. He would have treated with the supremest contempt any suggestion that either one or the other had thought a thought, much less lifted a finger, to the detriment of their charge; but it could not be expected that they should in their hearts welcome the restoration to health of this young supplanter as if he had been their son.

"Blotting," said John Parke, "I have something very serious to say to you. Do you know that Lady Frogmore has come

entirely to herself? She has not only fully recognized and acknowledged her son, but she seems to have forgotten that she ever did otherwise. Barker says it is what he always hoped—that a great shock some time would bring her completely back.”

“But do you think it will last?” said the lawyer, shaking his head.

“He thinks it will last; he is a better authority than I am. Well, she was to be the guardian, you know, and all we did has been done by private arrangement between ourselves to save public discussion—and may be changed in the same way.”

“I can’t think what you are driving at,” Mr. Blotting said.

“Oh, it is easy enough to understand. I don’t wish to resume the charge of the boy, Blotting, especially now when it will be full of embarrassments. His mother would always be interfering. I don’t deny her right. But it was only because she was disabled that I took it at all, don’t you know. I want to give it up now. I want to leave this house. Don’t you see it puts us in a false position living here? My children will suffer from it. They get exaggerated ideas of their own importance. They’re of no particular importance,” said John, with perhaps a faint bitterness in his tone, “and it’s very bad for them. There was all that fuss about Duke, for instance. I didn’t think of it at the time, but it was highly absurd. It was calculated to give the boy the most false idea——”

“We—ell,” said the co-trustee. He could not contradict this, which was certainly the truth, and had been remarked by everybody. “Perhaps there may be something in what you say; but that boy of yours is a capital fellow, Parke. How cleverly he brought his cousin in, and set things on their right footing.”

John did not for a moment reply. It is always pleasant to hear your son praised; but when he is praised for seeing further, and showing better sense than yourself, it is perhaps not so pleasant. Mr. Parke had thought a great deal since those recent events, and had seen many things in a different light. Amid other things, those festivities in which Duke was the hero now appeared to him in the light of an almost incredible piece of folly. He was glad to think that he had remonstrated at the time, but his remonstrances (which he did not now remember had been very feeble) were overborne. All the same he did not quite like it when his colleague so readily agreed. It would have been civil

at least to say that nobody else thought so, and that it was the most natural thing in the world.

"Well!" he said sharply, in a very different tone from that lingering monosyllable which expressed so unflatteringly an acquiescence in his own self-reproach. "We agree, you see, so far as that is concerned. And I am anxious to get back to my own house. Greenparke is our home, not this place, which belongs to my nephew. Now that his mother is quite restored she is the right person to make a home for him. There never can be any question as to her motives."

"Parke, there never has been, so far as I am aware, the slightest question as to your motives."

John waved his hand; he did not speak. Was it, perhaps, that he was not capable of doing so? He stood for a moment without saying anything, and then went on:

"Anyhow, it would be better for us all. One gets to think one has a right to things of which one has only the use. I don't like it for the children. I am anxious to get home. And our tenants there are going; their time is up. I should like it to be settled at once. It was between you and me before an amicable arrangement. Now we can return to the original letter of the will, don't you know. Mary must be the acting guardian as he wished. My brother," John said with a faint sigh, which he endeavoured to restrain, "had the most perfect confidence in his wife."

"Talking of that," said Mr. Blotting, "I hope, if you will allow me to say so, that you are not taking this important step without talking it over with Mrs. Parke. I know she is ill——"

"My wife and I are entirely of the same mind," said John hastily. "I know her opinion," he added, hesitating. "Lady Frogmore and she could not get on in the same house. They are very old friends, and there is a long-standing grievance——"

The lawyer laughed, as wise men do when the female element comes in. He thought he had now the key to the situation.

"Ah," he said, "I understand; the ladies are like that—very charming, but apt to have grudges, and hating each other like poison. They are all more or less like that."

It seemed to John in his momentary exasperation as if he would have liked to knock his fellow-trustee down. To treat his sombre misery as if it had no deeper origin than a trivial quarrell

And yet it was the kindest thing that could have been done. He said to himself, with a rebound of the habitual affection he had for his wife, and sense that her credit was his, that Letitia, whatever she might be, was no fool. Blotting's women might be idiots like that, but she was not. He had the deepest horror for her fault (whatever it was) in his own heart, and sometimes could hardly bear to speak to her from thought of what she had done. But he could not let another man touch her, or point a finger of scorn at her. Whatever Letitia might be she was his, and she was no fool.

Mrs. Parke recovered slowly, and for weeks the avenue was traversed by files of inquirers with the cards of all the best people about. And it seemed the most natural thing in the world that as soon as she was able she should be taken to her own home at Greenparke for change of air. Lady Frogmore had already gone, taking her son with her to her Dower House. It was said that there was something wrong with the drains at the great house, as there is in so many great establishments, and that after two cases of fever they must at once be seen to. In the commotion caused by this it need scarcely be said that the cottages at Westgate were forgotten, and continued till Mar's majority to be the most picturesque group of dwellings and the most poisonous centre of infection in the parish. Even when that time came it was almost too much for all the romantic people about to see them pulled down. The Park stood empty for a year or two, however, neither young Lord Frogmore nor his former guardian coming back; but as there were various very natural reasons for this, few questions were asked or remarks made. The young lord went abroad with his mother for some time, and when he returned he went to Oxford, which was what he had never been expected to be able for. But a fever is often rather a good thing when it is over, clearing away incipient mischief and settling the constitution. I do not venture to answer for this doctrine, but it was believed by all the servants and village people, who had now changed their opinion as to the practicability of "raring" Mar. By means of the changed treatment to which he was subjected, if not to the settling influence of his fever, he grew so strong that his unusual height seemed to be no drawback to him, and he was not without distinction in the records of his college in matters of athletic success, as well as in other ways. When he reached his

majority the festivities rivalled those of a similar period in the history of Duke, his cousin, but were not so imposing. And it was not very long after that great epoch when Lady Frogmore and her constant companion had an announcement made to them which was not unexpected, yet which it must be allowed they had done their best to avert. The reader, perhaps, will have divined what Mary meant when she laid her hand upon the shoulder of her little namesake, Mary Parke—still called Tiny by all her surroundings, though now tiny no more—and said, "It must be this one, for Letty is too old." And perhaps that experienced reader will also divine that Lady Frogmore's conclusion, possibly by mere force of the fact that it was her conclusion, proved wrong. I do not attempt to say anything to excuse the disadvantage of Letty's age; two years is no doubt a very serious matter when it occurs early in the twenties. But this may be alleged in extenuation, that Mar was very much grown up, almost elderly for his age. He was more like five-and-twenty than one-and-twenty, everybody said. His upbringing, which was on the whole somewhat solitary, and his delicate health as a boy, and the many thoughts into which his peculiar position and circumstances led him, were calculated to mature the mind. And young Frogmore felt himself quite the eldest member of the family when he came back with his degree (in modest honours) a year after his majority and found his mother and his aunt ready to worship him for being so clever, for being so strong, for having such good health, and for wearing the ribbon of his college eleven. They were not quite certain, at least Mary was not, for which of these things she was most grateful to her boy; but I myself have no doubt upon the subject. It was for being so well that she admired him most.

And the first thing he told them was—that it was Letty. Not her sister, whom Lady Frogmore had selected as most suitable in point of age, but the elder of the two, who was and had always been two years older than Mar. Those ladies were so full of the primitive prejudices of their kind that they did not like it. But then they liked Letty, which was much better. She was Letitia's child; but though Agnes still remembered that, she no longer feared that the mother's blood would show. Mary on her side had, notwithstanding everything, a satisfaction which made her fair life all the fairer in the thought that her marriage and her

child's birth were not altogether, after all, injurious to the family of her old friend.

All the events of the dreadful period before the John Parkes' retirement to their own house happily faded out of human knowledge in the course of these years. They were better off than they had been in their beginning from various causes—because for one thing they had been able to make considerable savings during their residence at the Park as guardians to young Lord Frogmore, and because old Lord Frogmore had made some important additions to their means before his death, and their children were well put out in the world, and prospered. But there was one thing which amid this prosperity never changed. John Parke never recovered the confidence in his wife which had been shattered on that July morning. It was never known what she had done, and indeed he forgot that she had done anything as the years went on ; but she was no longer to him the infallible guide, the unerring counsellor of the past. His faith had been destroyed ; he took her advice often, and what was more he left most things to her guidance by habit and indolence, as he had always done. But he did not believe in her as he had once done—that was over. It was a thing that had had few consequences, because, as I have said, of the indolence which grows with years and habit, which is much stronger than opinion ; but a thing almost as remarkable as John's want of faith, Letitia felt it, though it had so few practical results. She felt it more than she had ever felt anything impalpable in all the course of her life. It made very little difference externally, but yet she felt it to the bottom of her heart. And she for one never forgot those occurrences which destroyed her husband's faith in her. So far as could be known they had altogether passed from the recollection of Lady Frogmore, but Letitia never forgot. She gave the incident a twist, however, which made it a matter to talk about, and even to exult over, by one of the strangest distortions of thought ever recorded. There was nothing she was so fond of talking of as the tremendous responsibility that had been laid upon her when John undertook the charge of Frogmore. "For it is easy talking," Mrs. Parke would say, "about John undertaking it. What had John to do with the bringing up of a delicate boy? Of course it was me ; and if ever there was a responsibility in this world which I should recommend everybody to avoid it is

the task of bringing up other people's children: and a very delicate boy, and one that it would have been a positive advantage to us if anything had happened to him. Can you imagine such a position? I would not undertake it again if the Queen were to ask me. It is a life-long subject of gratitude to me," Mrs. Parke would add with a sigh of satisfaction, "that he got no harm in my house."

And John listened to this over and over again repeated, and is never clear why it annoys him so. For events grow dim after the course of years, and he never did know what Letitia had done. Meanwhile it is and will remain for all her life Mrs. Parke's great subject of self-felicitation that Lord Frogmore never came to any harm while he remained under her care.

THE END.

La Taglioni.

IT was in the winter of 1879-1880 that I accompanied a young lady to a select dancing class in Connaught Square.

"Select" it might truly be called, being composed entirely of youthful members of noble families; and when we entered the dancing-room it was impossible not to be struck by the beauty and high bearing of these young girls, whose ages varied from that of seven or eight years to that of, apparently, seventeen or eighteen.

It was long since I had attended a dancing class, and then it was not as now, when my dancing days were over, but when, in fact, they were only beginning, and I was present in the capacity of pupil instead of on-looker. Recollection brought before me the young ladies of my youthful days in their book-muslin frocks and sandalled shoes performing their various steps under the instruction of our dancing master—a Parisian *maitre de ballet*—whose skill and grace were all that might be expected from such an instructor, but nevertheless caused us at times great inward merriment, as we beheld him with flying coat tails, and violin and bow in hand—*pirouetting* on the tips of his pointed toes for our edification. He was his own musician, and never by any chance relinquished his instrument, however difficult might be the *pas* he was executing.

But, however inwardly amused we might be, never did we dare betray our merriment; for our master had the temper of a veritable *diable*, and there were none of us who did not quail beneath the angry flash of his fierce black eyes. And none who had once encountered a rap from his bow on their hapless toes—protected by a silken stocking and shoe of softest kid or satin only—would ever risk encountering another.

I was anticipating a somewhat similar scene, and was therefore unprepared to find presiding at a pianoforte a quiet, elderly, white-haired lady, who, motioning to us to be seated, informed us that "Madame" would be with us almost immediately.

For the moment I had forgotten that it was a lady professor who was to conduct the class. Soon the door opened and she entered. To my surprise, I saw that this lady professor was not a young lady, neither was she a middle-aged lady, nor, indeed—truth bids me to say—what might be called an elderly lady, but an undeniably *old* lady; small in stature, but full of delicacy, refinement, and grace, notwithstanding that she was slightly bent—one shoulder, that is, being bent down lower than the other.

Her face was expressive of great intelligence, and her eyes sparkled with vivacity in spite of her enfeebled gait and evident tokens of physical weakness, while a certain air about her seemed to say that she was bent with something heavier than even the weight of years.

She wore a training gown of rich black silk, while a thick braid of perfectly white hair was coiled round her head in place of a cap.

She came forward, greeting with pleasant smile the ladies assembled, who, most of them mothers of the pupils, and therefore of high rank, warmly and cordially acknowledged her salutations.

The old lady spoke in French. Not with the loud volubility of most French women, but with a gentleness and softness which corresponded with her every movement.

Having exchanged civilities with the elders, "Madame" took her station at one end of the front drawing-room, which was that devoted to the dance (the back room being appropriated to the lookers-on), and the young ladies, who had all risen at her entrance, were called up one by one to make their courtesy to her as she extended her hand to them, one after the other, like a queen receiving homage from her subjects.

Her dignity became her well, for she was, in truth, one who had been accustomed to receive homage from the world—not the homage of subjects alone, but the homage of crowned heads also. Yes; princes and princesses; grand dukes and grand duchesses; kings and queens; emperors and empresses—all these had in days gone by done homage to, and flung tributes of admiration at the feet of this little lady who was now established in Connaught Square, London, as a simple *professeur de danse*.

Truly, she had reigned in bygone days absolute queen of the art which now in her old age she was constrained to teach a rising generation in order to furnish means for her maintenance.

For this was no other than the inimitable Marie Taglioni, who some fifty years before had charmed the whole civilized world with the magic of her grace and incomparable skill in the dance ; reducing it in her own person to an expression of the utmost poetical refinement.

The little feet which had then flitted across the stage in the execution of those marvellous *pas* which had ever evoked unbounded, rapturous applause, though aged now and we may well think a little weary, were not to rest yet awhile. Their labours, even at past three-score years and ten, were not fully accomplished ; they had still a task to perform. They must needs trip it yet a while longer, though on a far different and less brilliant stage than that on which in their youth they had performed. Poor Marie Taglioni ! Those tiny feet had turned the heads of many a strong and gallant man in the old bygone days ; they were doing more serious service now in directing the steps of grand-children, probably, of those who had then succumbed to the power of their fascination.

Often must the old lady's thoughts have reverted—possibly with a sigh—to her former triumphs, of which the whole room gave testimony.

The walls were hung with pictures of the emphatically *Première Danseuse*, in almost every attitude assumed by her in the various *ballets* in which she had appeared ; sometimes executing a *pas seul*, sometimes a *pas de trois* in company with Lucile Grahn, Mademoiselle Cerito, or—if I recollect rightly—Fanny Ellsler. In all cases the attitudes were charmingly graceful, the costumes modest and becoming.

On a small table, beneath a glass shade, was a massive piece of plate—I forget at this moment what was its subject, but no doubt something representative of the Terpsichorean art ; while on the base was an inscription from which one learned that this had been subscribed for by Prince George of Cambridge and members of the English aristocracy—all of whose names were given—and presented to Marie Taglioni upon her retirement from the stage—then more than forty years ago.

Over the mantelpiece hung a gilt frame surrounding—on a background of white satin—a large wreath of laurels, on every leaf of which was inscribed in golden letters the name of an European city in which a victory had been achieved by this

unrivalled *danseuse*. The wreath was tied by a large bow of white satin ribbon which also had its words of tribute worked in gold thread. Attached were the names of the distinguished personages who had contributed to lay this also as a farewell offering at her feet on the occasion of her retirement from public life.

And only this very day she had received a further acknowledgment of her genius in a few kind and gracious words sent her by Queen Victoria.

The Queen—as I was told—happened to call that morning at Kensington Palace just as her young cousin the Princess Victoria of Teck was starting for Connaught Square to receive her dancing lesson from Madame Taglioni, and hearing where she was going, her Majesty charged her with the following message to the veteran *artiste*: “Tell Madame Taglioni from me,” she said, “what great pleasure it gives me to know that you are receiving lessons from such an instructress. Tell her, also, that it was her inimitable grace—which I can never forget—that inspired me with the passionate love of dancing which I possessed in my youth.”

Could her Majesty have seen the look of delight and pride with which the aged *danseuse* listened as her companion repeated to us the royal message, I feel sure she would have rejoiced at the gratification which her kindly words had afforded.

I must not forget to mention a portrait hanging in a corner of the back drawing-room of Monsieur le Comte de * * * * *, Marie Taglioni's late husband, into whose pockets, and all too quickly out of them again, had fallen all the golden earnings of his wife's ever-active fairy feet.

During the many visits which I afterwards paid to Connaught Square, I learned much of the past history of the celebrated dancer, and was shown many of the numberless trophies of her past conquests—gifts from royal and illustrious personages. Amongst many interesting mementos of the long-ago was a pair of worn and frayed satin shoes to which my attention was particularly directed. They were the shoes in which Marie Taglioni had danced her farewell dance on the stage; and while they were being shown to me, I noted that she herself regarded them with something more than interest, with the proud fondness with which some old general might look upon a relic of his last battle.

Curious and wondrously small shoes they were, of black satin with a sole considerably less than the foot. Into this tiny sole the satin was gathered beneath the foot and darned backwards and forwards with thread so as to prevent as much as possible the satin from fraying, and such shoes were capable of yielding with greater suppleness to the motion of the feet than if their soles were entirely of leather.

Mademoiselle Taglioni had frequently worn out two pairs of shoes in one night's dance.

A thick volume was also lent me for inspection filled with criticisms of the Press on La Taglioni, from her earliest appearance to her last—all laudatory in the highest degree of the incomparable dancer and of the height to which by her exposition she had raised the dance; showing what it might and ought to be, and not degrading it, as too many by their assumption of the art have done.

The following interesting particulars of Madame Taglioni's life were likewise communicated to me.

Marie Taglioni was the daughter of a Swedish *mattre de ballet*, who devoted special care to his daughter's training, and exercised no slight severity in fitting her for the profession to which she was destined.

She was but sixteen years of age when it was decided that she should make her *début* on the stage at Stockholm. Many and stern were the injunctions of her over-anxious father that she should do credit to herself and him, and repeat before an expectant audience—with the same skill shown at previous rehearsals—the difficult steps and figures which it had cost months of arduous, painstaking tuition on the one part, of careful, laborious practice on the other, to acquire.

Direful were the consequences with which the father threatened his child should she fail in the performance of the slightest particular, while the daughter promised that nothing should be wanting on her part to ensure success. She felt confident that after so many perfect rehearsals it would be impossible to fail in giving her father the gratification he anticipated. But alas! no sooner was she actually before the foot-lights, in presence of the large and fashionable audience welcoming with applause the *entrée* of the young *débutante* from whom so much was expected, than courage, memory, self-possession, all forsook her; and,

trembling, nervous, and abashed, she could but acknowledge by repeated courtesies the cordial greetings of the public, whilst utterly unconscious of what was next to be done. Of all her father's long and solicitous instruction she could remember absolutely nothing. Everything was a complete blank to her. In spite of all the careful rehearsals, she was as ignorant of what she had come before the curtain to do as though she had never learnt a single step.

Blushing and quivering with shame at her miserable failure; quailing in anticipation of the outpouring of wrath—the storm of blows even—which awaited her from her father; in an agony of despair at the utter powerlessness of her every effort to regain recollection, she suddenly became conscious that it was necessary at all hazards to do something; and bounding across the stage without further hesitation, she executed a dance, which, though owning no affinity to the elaborate *pas seul* to which so many months of arduous practice had been devoted, nevertheless drew from the audience such a storm of rapturous applause as to more than fulfil the most sanguine expectations.

Again and again, and yet again, was the young girl called before the curtain at the close of the dance to receive the demonstrations of approval which her fairy-like grace had won from the public. Wreaths, bouquets, and more substantial tributes were showered upon her in superabundance, and upon retiring at last behind the scenes she was folded in the arms of her delighted parent, who embraced her again and again while tears of joy flowed down his cheeks and mingled with those of his child, overcome as she was by the excitement through which she had just passed.

It is probable that in this *impromptu* dance—this dance of desperation, as it may be called—the marvellous natural grace and elegance of the young *débutante* appeared to higher advantage, while following the spontaneous guidance of her own refined fancy, than would have been the case had she been fettered by the restraints and trammels of rules and prescribed action. Here, her own real genius proclaimed itself; there, she would have given evidence of the result of careful study.

Be it, however, as it may, from that moment Marie Taglioni's success was determined, and she was henceforth hailed as a star in the sphere of dance before whose lustre all others paled. From

thence dated the long list of triumphs, achieved during a quarter of a century, crowned by the laurels on the representation of which she looked with such pardonable pride in her old age.

But, if her public career had been one of splendid success, of unrivalled triumph in her art, her domestic life had been the reverse.

Marriage had given her a title, but it had robbed her of the rich rewards of the conquests of her youth and prime.

M. le Comte de ***** had invested his wife's golden earnings in the pursuit of his own pleasures, and they had consequently melted into thin air, as capital so invested is but too apt to melt. I do not remember how many children there were of the marriage. I saw an oil portrait of a daughter who must have been a very handsome woman. She had married a Russian prince; but certainly circumstances were not then flourishing, for a daughter, "Princess Marguerite," was acting as assistant to her grandmother.

Madame Taglioni had also a son, to whom she was devotedly attached, and with whom in the south of France she had for many years found a home. Severe reverses had, however, at length assailed this son. The happy home was broken up. His mother would not remain to be a burden in the straitened circumstances.

Marie Taglioni might then, indeed, have appealed to the public, whose idol in former years she had been, for a subscription wherewith to purchase an annuity on which to live for the remainder of her days. But, no! She would ask neither for public nor private charity. A little courage only, a little resolution, a little gathering together of her forces, physical and moral. The small, supple feet which had done so much execution in the days of youth must be called into action again at over three-score years and ten!

There was no hesitation. Madame Taglioni set off for London—the scene of so many of her proudest victories—and there established dancing-classes for the daughters of the aristocracy. She was warmly welcomed by the British nobility, who used all their influence in her behalf and showed her every mark of delicate sympathy and respect.

The old lady derived no small amusement, I was told, at the commencement of her establishment at Connaught Square, from

the number of white-haired old gentlemen who presented themselves at her door to leave their cards, or to request the favour of being allowed to look once again on the Taglioni who had so fascinated them in their youth.

Even at seventy-four the great Mistress of Dance must have retained much of the surpassing grace which had distinguished her early days.

The young ladies assembled for the benefit of her instruction were all highly born and had all the elegance and gracefulness of bearing which is natural to youth and high breeding; yet what a contrast they formed to their aged mistress! How beautifully rounded was the movement of her arms; how exquisitely graceful her every attitude; how wonderful the elegance of her courtesies!

Never shall I forget one dance in particular in which she herself took part. An extremely pretty dance it was—a scene apparently from a *ballet* of the long past. Sixteen young ladies were required to perform in it, each bearing and effecting manœuvres (requiring the utmost dexterity and skilfulness of execution) with a scarf of lightest *tulle*. At the conclusion of the dance, each performer had to sink low on her knees, while at the same time throwing the scarf above her head so as to form a circle round it, and holding the ends as the arms crossed on the chest. This was really a difficult thing to do, as was evidenced by the struggles of the young ladies, their awkward attempts and vain efforts to acquit themselves properly.

Over and over again must the figure be performed—ever with the same unsuccess. At length, Taglioni—whose patience had been sorely tried by her pupils' futile attempts to follow her directions—herself took the place of one of the young girls and joined in the *ballet*.

Impossible would it be for me to describe the effect produced as the venerable lady glided, rather than danced, with a sylph-like motion beyond power of imitation. Never before had I seen anything to compare with it. And when she *threw*, I was going to say, but that would be a wrong word—there was no throwing—when she caused the light scarf to float above her head as she held the two ends in her crossed arms, and sank on her knees before those assembled, there was a murmur of applause which none could restrain, and which caused a rosy

blush to suffuse the aged cheeks, and the eyes to glisten with somewhat perchance of the old pride with which she had received the applause of very different assemblies.

It was the prettiest thing I have ever seen in the way of dancing—a thing never to be forgotten.

Brave Marie Taglioni! Those nimble little feet of yours had bounded with their airy steps over many a famous stage. Fair flowers, flashing jewels, rich tributes of various kinds had been cast beneath them; how many brilliant conquests had they not achieved in the old days of youth and beauty! I think their grandest victory was reserved for the last—their victory over misfortune, weakness, old age! It is pleasant to know that a little respite was granted them before being laid finally to rest in the grave. Shortly after the time of which I write, events enabled the courageous old lady to relinquish her dancing lessons and return to the south of France, there to find a home once more with the son whom she so tenderly loved; and in his house, a few years later, she died.

Ever shall I look back with pleasure on my experience—though a late one—of the inimitable dancer, Marie Taglioni.

2

Dido's Deliverer.

By C. STAFFORD.

MR. BENSON was taking his usual after-lunch, or "after-dinner nap," one should say, for "the Bensons," being only "dining-room floor lodgers for a permanency," Mrs. Parkinson, their landlady, aided and abetted by the Bensons' purse, had brought stress to bear upon the family arrangement with regard to meals. Mr. Benson was in the habit of saying that he liked all his surroundings to be simple, and Mrs. Parkinson, and Mr. Benson's fate—or what he called his fate—had agreed that this taste should be gratified. Mr. Benson's daily morning occupation sounded as if no great strain or complication was connected with it—at least when defined by Mrs. Parkinson (who knew all about it) as "hanging about Kensington Museum;" and certainly his regular afternoon employment, of which he was giving an example, was one in which any baby might engage and fulfil even as efficiently as Mr. Benson, lying back in his chair and accompanying his inactive industry by deep breathing, which it might be an impertinence to call a snore.

As part of his surroundings Mr. Benson had a daughter, who, according to Mrs. Parkinson's ideas, must be a very bundle of guileless simplicity ("for all her good looks and her cleverness"), or she, the daughter, would have "wakened her pa up," not only from his afternoon sleep, but from his general slumberous quietude. Mr. Benson had a wife, too, but of her the unhesitating verdict was that she, Lady Elizabeth Benson, must have been "pretty simple" to have done what that lady undoubtedly had done—that is, run away with her brother, Lord Pemberton's, secretary, when (so said Mrs. Parkinson, who had been her maid) Lady Elizabeth was "forty, if she was a day." The opinion had been deepened, too, by the fact that after she had taken this step Lady Elizabeth had allowed herself to be "kicked off" by her family, and left with nothing but, what had been her pocket-money formerly, one hundred and seventy pounds a year—to maintain, as Lord Pemberton had said, her sentimental husband upon.

Mr. Benson's daughter was sitting by the window, in the midst of the "simple surroundings" of Mrs. Parkinson's dining-room. She was making herself a frock, or what she, in respect for her own handiwork when the garment had arrived at completion, would dignify by that name, though her mother had mentioned that nothing on earth would ever persuade her (Lady Elizabeth) to term it anything but "a covering." What a difficulty there had been in getting the means to buy the blue serge to make that "covering;" and what a series of disappointments in connection with the making of it after Dido had the material! A talent for dressmaking, to tell the truth, does not invariably come, even by second nature, and it certainly had not come by first to poor Dido. Mrs. Parkinson's services had been thrown into the breach in the way of "fitting on," and Mrs. Parkinson, as she said, had once been "a lady's maid in the peerage," but many years had passed since the filling of this remarkable position, and even Mrs. Parkinson owned that her "hand had got out."

Dido's well-formed, well-balanced little head, with its loosely-rolled, sunny brown hair, was bending far down over the blue heap in her lap, as she opened and shut a pair of large scissors, cutting cautiously round the jagged edges left where she had just sewn in a sleeve. The scissors creaked raspingly with each opening and closing of their lank jaws—a fact which caused their user to turn an occasional apprehensive glance from her brown eyes (eyes with a curious, almost golden light in their depths—"the Pemberton eyes," Lady Elizabeth said) towards a shabby leather-covered chair, in the most comfortable corner of the room, where Mr. Benson's reposeful figure was on view, his long, waxen-white, filbert-nailed fingers clasped placidly across his waistcoat.

We mention Mr. Benson's figure more particularly for the reason that the massive beauties of his face were covered by a yellowish-white silk handkerchief, through which all that showed was a raised curved line, representing what Mrs. Parkinson would have called "the hook of his great, big Wellington nose." Mrs. Parkinson, in the privacy of the lower regions of the house, was in the habit of stating that she "never did know anybody with that kind of nose as ever did any good, except the Duke of Wellington" (rather as if she had had an intimate

acquaintance with the illustrious exception to the rule), and that it made her feel "quite flustered" to see her lodger, as she put it, "following his all over the place."

Dido had feared her operation of making the squeaking scissors trot and amble round the arena of the seam of her sleeve might interfere with her father's always jealously-guarded slumbers, but if their feeble offence was to scare Morpheus from the dining-room of 6, Balaclava Terrace, what would be the result of the thundering rat-a-tat-a-tat-a-tat, under cover of which Dido completed the course round the top of the sleeve at a quick gallop. She laid down the scissors with a sigh of relief and an aching hand, and turned the "Pemberton" eyes towards the broad back of a self-contained looking cabman, who had just brought his performance on the Parkinsons' knocker to an end with a neat flourish. There was a cab in sight, as well as a cabman, a four-wheeler, carrying on its roof a scientifically-arranged erection of five portmanteaus, a packing case apparently of books, a type-writing machine, a gun-case, fishing-tackle, tennis-racquets, umbrellas and canes, folding-stools, etc., and inside a miscellaneous collection of framed pictures, and a large Newfoundland dog gravely taking the air with its muzzle resting on the ledge of the open window.

Mrs. Parkinson had mentioned that morning that she expected a "new drawing-room floor lodger," and added, not without a twinkle in her eye, that she hoped Mr. Benson would not be "woke up," so naturally Dido's wits grasped the truth that here were the new lodger's effects arriving, and also that a more than usual amount of lumbering, bumping and thudding sounds would accompany the transport of the cargo to its owner's future residence. Memory also warned her as to what in consequence would be likely to occur in the particular room in which she sat, and she called to her mind that she would be alone to bear the brunt of it, for Lady Elizabeth was out taking the air in Kensington Gardens, with all the dignity possible in conjunction with a bath-chair propelled by Parkinson. Dido stood for a second, her tall figure drawn to its full height, her long neck craned as she turned her head, with her eyebrows raised, and the beginning of a surprised smile on her red lips, towards her father. Why hadn't he awakened?

Oh, dear! he was beginning to move. Dido felt discretion the

better part of valour, and leaving Mr. Benson and her dress-making difficulties behind her, walked lightly out of the room, and ran up two flights of stairs to her own little bedroom, reaching it just as a hansom, bearing the new lodger, turned in at one end of Balaclava Terrace, and Lady Elizabeth, in her bath-chair, at the other. Almost at the same moment, the first notes of the expected warfare sounded downstairs.

First floated up Mrs. Parkinson's shrill, verbose directions as to how to avoid injuring the 'all lamp, and the 'orns of the 'at-stand; then joined in the deep—very deep—mellow tones of Mr. Benson, evidently from a position on his own door-mat, and as Dido's imagination correctly told her, with the yellowish silk handkerchief brandished in one hand, and the martial nose portentously *en evidence*, as the owner of it asked what could be the meaning of this uproar, and made the proposition that the "goods and chattels" should be left in the hall till he, Mr. Benson, the monarch of what he surveyed on the dining-room floor, should betake himself for his evening walk.

Dido from her pretty (Lady Elizabeth had taken care of that) little perch, near the clouds, became aware of a sudden lull downstairs. This had been brought about by the walking in at the front door of dear, diminutive Lady Elizabeth, and a certain wave of her preternaturally small gloved hand—a wave which Mr. Benson seemed to associate with his presence being required in the interior of his own premises. Behind Lady Elizabeth came in a tall, perhaps rather plain-looking, but well-bred, well-dressed young man, who it may be remarked glanced over the head of Lady Elizabeth at the retreating figure of Mr. Benson with something like recognition, a kind of, "Ah, you *are* there, as I had hoped," expression.

Dido, after a time, came to the conclusion that the lull was going to become a continuous silence, and ventured down again for the purpose of bringing her forces to bear on the second sleeve of "the covering." She found the hall blocked with boxes, &c., and the street door solemnly shut, and, picking her way amongst the boxes, she read the name "Carisbrooke" on a labe sticking up aggressively from a strap, and passed in to find the mental atmosphere of the parental sitting-room pleasant enough, Mr. Benson seeming to receive some mysterious gratification from the abrupt stoppage which had been put to Mrs. Parkinson's

intentions by her new lodger, and the consequent state of chaos outside the door.

At six in the evening, Lady Elizabeth, with Mr. Benson, solemn and imposing as, say three members of parliament rolled into one, and supported on the other side by tall Dido, went out. They passed through the garden-gate, and turned to walk in the direction of the High Street, Kensington, where a little circulating library, patronized by Lady Elizabeth, had its home.

As the three noticeable figures moved away down the flag-stone paved street, an awful frock of sickly, greenish grey was doing its best to blur and thicken Dido's slim grace of outline, so as to meet the moderate expectations of a lenient public respecting the girlish form divine. The garment had had a year's experience in the work, was receiving the assistance of a specially unbecoming black hat, and had nothing to interfere with its aim, but a fine lace scarf, which, knotted round Dido's little throat, accentuated her stately height as it fell to her feet; but the frock's attempts were useless. The fact is, not even "the covering," when it was completed, would be successful in making Dido Benson's appearance fit comfortably into her present environment.

The new lodger, in a lounging chair, and smoking a very good cigar, the fragrance of which floated temptingly down to Mr. Benson's olfactory organs, took his cigar from between his lips, and gave a muffled exclamation of, "By Jove, she is here!" This, although he had taken the rooms, as soon as their last occupant had left them, only for the reason that he was aware the individual he referred to passed her days beneath the shelter of the roof she had just quitted. The truth was that though he was perfectly familiar with seeing Dido go into the house, he had never before seen her come out of it, and when a fixed mental picture has remained long before the mind, there is something confusing in finding it suddenly reverse itself. Then again in his picture he had only been familiar with one figure as an accessory to Dido's, that of the potent-looking gentleman now steadily retreating from sight, with a three-volume novel under one arm. Never before had the tiny figure of Lady Elizabeth come into the tableau.

Every Saturday afternoon, during the season, Mr. Benson walked in solemn grandeur by the railing of Rotten Row, with Dido by his side, but nothing would ever persuade Lady

Elizabeth to run the risk of being recognized there, for all the wealth she could have exhibited in the shape of a beautiful daughter to balance the visible signs of her broken fortune.

Many a time, leaving the whirligig scene at the same moment that Dido and her father turned away, the owner of the eyes, now looking with such a tender light in them after Dido, and Dido's father and mother, had followed two of the group almost to the doorway of No. 6, seen them disappear within, then turned upon his heel, and reached his club about the hour at which it was Lady Elizabeth's fixed habit to appear on the *tapis* on foot.

A growl from his dog told him there was a knock at the door, and Parkinson's chastened countenance presented itself with the information that my lady and Mr. Benson were out, and in Parkinson's opinion this would be a good opportunity for getting the hall cleared.

Mr. Carisbrooke agreed with him, and presently, between two successive appearances of Parkinson and a perspiring boy, at each end of a portmanteau, he ceased his puffing, and lazily asked what was the name of the gentleman in the rooms below, and immediately came into possession of more of the Bensons' history than he would have gained in five years of ordinary calling and dining association with them.

"Poor little thing!" said he, when Parkinson and the boy left him in peace. The term may be supposed to have been used with regard to Lady Elizabeth, but in fact it was applied to her by no means ill-cared for, serenely beautiful, tall daughter, and he smiled dreamily before him, as one who has practical evidence that the gods are fighting on his side.

In whatever way matters had arranged themselves, the end must have been the same, he told himself. Dido Benson must have been his wife, but it was pleasant to find a state of things which had a kernel of advantage, only with a thin shell of difficulty—a shell which it wanted little more than his well-filled purse to crack into splinters. It never once occurred to Carisbrooke that he would not be able to make Dido Benson love him, though he had only once met her eyes, and that a year ago. There must be some instinct in these affairs, for Carisbrooke was a sensible enough fellow, not given to overwhelming self-esteem.

He had intended to go to see Mrs. Langtry, in her mistaken

venture of "Linda Grey," but somehow time passed on, with him still in the same place, another cigar between his lips, and his chair so near the open window that he was almost under the darkening sky, with here and there a starry eye appearing magically and beaming tranquilly down upon him from its high dwelling-place. He lay back waiting, listening for the returning sound of three pairs of footsteps, that he might pick out the music made by one firm little tread; after those feet had passed in, he would go out.

Meanwhile the six feet were approaching nearer, passing by the red brick wall of Kensington Workhouse and onwards. The sparse stars were twinkling down upon the party with equal affability to that which they were displaying over in the direction of Balaclava Terrace, and Dido was looking up at them, with a longing for something she hardly knew what in her heart, and with no knowledge, in the midst of the evening glamour, that the vaguely longed-for blessing was on its way to her, and that the somebody who was to be its giver was not a person likely to tarry long in offering it. Lady Elizabeth's sphinx-like little face was showing no signs of what was going on within her mind. The rustling by the freshly-rising night wind of some old trees she had passed near was still in her ears, bringing back memories of Pemberton Park; she was thinking with too keen a feeling to be disposed of as wholly sentimental that the fate of the built-in trees bore some resemblance to her own. Mr. Benson, for his part, stalked stiffly on, with a well-arched back, and a change of volumes nipped under his elbow, as he poured out in deep-hushed tones a running commentary on the exasperating slowness of some official in connection with the Indian Museum.

The order of events for which Carisbrooke was waiting having fulfilled themselves, he carried himself out somewhere to get a decent dinner. The Parkinsons were superior people, but he was not going to intrust his digestion, at any rate, at that momentous period of the day, to Mrs. Parkinson's tender mercies. He came back before eleven o'clock, having managed to form such an opinion of Mrs. Langtry's wisdom as could be gained by sitting out one act while thinking of something else.

He had come back with the benevolent intention of seeing how Sigurd, the Newfoundland, was getting on in his new quarters,

and to take the "old fellow" for a run, although Parkinson had been arranged with to take this evening duty, which he had accepted willingly, possibly with a sense of fitness as to its balancing his morning charioteering in connection with Lady Elizabeth's chair. Before Sigurd and Sigurd's master had got under weigh, a cracked piano sounded below, and a sweet full voice (a voice which did no end of justice to the training of Lady Elizabeth's masters appearing at second-hand in her daughter) sent trilling up to his sharp ears, "*O Robert, toi que j'aime.*" Carisbrooke took off his hat again, caught his dog by the collar, and went out on the balcony to listen better under the sky; troops of stars were on sentinel now, all, as it seemed, in a delirious mood, throbbing and glittering as if with some specially exciting business on hand. Sigurd pressed his great, tawny, faithful body hard against his master's legs, and gave a big, loving lick to the nervous hand grasping the flimsy railing of the little balcony, keeping the bay of joy, with which he had been going to rouse the neighbourhood, rolling dully in his throat till the last note of his unknown future mistress's voice had died away.

All things come to those who wait, we are cheerfully told; but Carisbrooke was not to be much longer amongst those who require to be bolstered by the stimulating encouragement to masterly inactivity. He was coming downstairs next morning, when he encountered Mr. Benson, taking his hat from one of the "orn's of the 'at-stand."

"Mr. Benson, I believe I have to apologize to you for some annoyance caused by my arrival yesterday."

An exclamation in his daughter's voice stopped Mr. Benson's sonorous, elegant reply to this advance, making itself felt, as it were, somewhere between his shoulder-blades, the level to which Dido's chin came. She had just passed after him through the half-open doorway, her eyes, as she did so, falling full on Carisbrooke's face.

"Oh," a little smile quivered over her lips, and involuntarily her hand came eagerly out past her father's pepper-and-salt coat sleeve. Mr. Benson wheeled round, his shoulder almost brushing his daughter's cheek. "Papa, this is the gentleman who—who, well—prevented you having to identify your daughter, alive or dead, at the nearest hospital to Burlington House. I should never have *walked back that* afternoon, had it not been for something

which this gentleman did. I cannot tell what, but something which caused that horse, that dreadful white creature, to be not so close to me, or I so close to it," and a shiver passed over her, before, with a change of manner again, she looked up half shyly; half merrily, into Mr. Benson's taken-aback countenance. "And I believe," she went on, turning the "Pemberton" eyes with quick gratitude to Carisbrooke again, "I gave you hardly one word of thanks; I have often wished I could see you again."

A ghost of a smile came into Carisbrooke's answering grey eyes, as he thought how very often and how very easily Dido might have attained her wish, if she had looked in this or that direction a few paces from where she happened to be walking.

Carisbrooke had never witnessed more arrant carelessness in a driver than in that of the maniacal white beast of which Dido had spoken, at least, that was what he said some minutes later as he leant over a green rep couch in the corner of which was seated dear little Lady Elizabeth.

"And you, my dear, I can guess, would be crossing the Quadrangle in one of your day-dreams," said that lady, shaking her small head reprovingly, glancing across at the slim, stately figure by the fire-place. (Dido, for some reason, now that she had had more time to think matters over, was looking bewitchingly shy.) "You should remember cabmen are but mortal, and it is not fair to tempt them to vary the monotony of their lives by a nice, easy, blameless murder, from your not keeping it in mind that vehicles, with 'fares' in a hurry, are about the streets as well as your day-dreaming self."

Carisbrooke, as he looked across with a laughing face towards Dido, had a sudden recollection as to his first sight of her, a quivering, terrified girl, the gaunt head of an old horse, its teeth grinning, as its driver reined the animal back, the poor brute's chest touching Dido's shoulder, the shafts projecting either side of her as the horse slid along almost on its haunches. What he had done, he knew no more than did Dido, but the next second he had managed to free her from her awkward position, and was supporting her, feeling her heart palpitating wildly, as he carried on a momentary, by no means mild conversation with "cabby."

When the danger was over, quite a number of would-be rescuers showed signs of bearing down upon the two, with, as

Carisbrooke noticed, even if Dido did not, a policeman, with a pocket-book, in the rear. Then with hardly more than an interchange of apologetic glances, and a slight bow, the couple had parted, Dido keeping on her way, and walking as firmly as she could up the steps into the Academy, and Carisbrooke coolly strolling away in the other direction. Mr. Benson had promised to bring Dido to see the pictures that day, and then, for some reason, the Indian Museum had not yielded up its devotee at the usual time. Lady Elizabeth, on household economies intent, was away with Parkinson, and the bath-chair, at the "Stores," and Dido, vexed, yet feeling a little guilty, had actually taken the unparalleled step of going alone to Burlington House, running some chance as it turned out of not retracing her steps.

This was told to Lady Elizabeth, but Carisbrooke did not mention that after he had walked away he had returned, passed into the Academy again, and moved from room to room until he had once more caught sight of the striking-looking girl, as to whom he could not feel easy until he knew "she was all safe, and recovered from her fright." He had found her standing before Collier's newly dead Cleopatra, the "smart" visitors moving to-and-fro past her and the picture, one now and then looking at her with an expression of some surprise, and more admiration. Dido herself was not noticing the living part of the spectacle, her interest being strictly *mural*. Carisbrooke had remained one half-hour, respectfully waiting for her to faint; another, to watch the changes of the beautiful, preoccupied face, fascinating him more and more as the colour gradually became less fluctuating in it; two more half-hours because it had ceased to occur to him to go away while she was there; when she passed through the "out" turnstile, he had done the same; he had followed her at a distance, down the wide matted stairs, and along the streets towards Kensington, with the setting sun closing in the prospect towards the Addison Road Station for Dido to look at, and with Dido for Carisbrooke to look at.

When Balaclava Terrace had swallowed her up from his sight, Carisbrooke had turned away puzzled, supposing he would never see her again; but on the following Saturday, leaning over the railing of Hyde Park, from the tail of his eye he became suddenly conscious of the same outline approaching, and turned

his head to find Dido again within a few yards of him, with Mr. Benson moving in solemn state by her side. Carisbrooke had had Coningsby, a particular chum of his, on hand just then, but he had hurriedly detached himself, and proceeded with idiotic obstinacy to resume his silent and somewhat ineffectual investigations.

Before Carisbrooke's introduction was well over, Mr. Benson's always pressing, always shadowy, always fruitless business was drawing him once more towards his daily haunt in the neighbourhood of Cromwell Road, but even already Lady Elizabeth's sharp eyes and thankful heart had some suspicion of the feelings of the nephew and heir of her old friend, Sir Robert Carisbrooke. Her spirits went up amazingly. Dido, as she moved nearer, and took her part in the conversation, needed a little effort to keep an expression of surprise escaping her, as she looked at the sprightly little lady—with the decided "air"—in the corner of the couch, her feet on a footstool, and two tiny, dry-skinned little hands, gesticulating, marking off her witty, rather bitter, little speeches, a kind of sarcastically polite jargon, new to Dido, but apparently not so to Carisbrooke, who seemed to be much entertained by it. Could this be her usually depressed-looking little mother, with the pinched features, and the silent tongue?

Carisbrooke, through Parkinson's "flow of soul," had arrived at a surprising amount of information concerning Lady Elizabeth's doings in past days; he now through Lady Elizabeth's "feast of reason" came into a similar amount of knowledge relating to the early years of twin aunts of his, who had come out in the same season as that which had seen Lady Elizabeth's *début*, together with the annals of a number of the elders of "his set." Lady Elizabeth took them up link by link, and ticked them off, disposing of those who had "not treated her well" with an epigrammatic neatness and brevity, born of much thinking, with an aching heart, in lonely hours. Dido, with a new womanliness, got more of a glimpse of her mother, as a whole, not simply as Dido's mother, than she would have had to her dying day, had not one connected with the circle from which she had vanished suddenly appeared on the scene.

When Carisbrooke took his leave, little Lady Elizabeth, for a moment stood looking up at her tall daughter with brightened eyes. She met the "Pemberton" eyes answering hers with a look

of sympathy. Lady Elizabeth dropped her eyelids suddenly (they had *such* crow's-toes at their corners), and their lashes, still long, fringed themselves with wet. She saw that she had now in her daughter, not only a daughter, but that which the elder woman had lacked for so long that she had been chilled into never expecting to have such again—a comprehending woman-friend. "My dear," she said, "I'll go upstairs and say my prayers," and with that she passed out of the room, her ladyship's little feet, as they went higher and higher, beating out on each step a jubilant song—"I couldn't have done better for her if she had had every chance, and I'm sure he's a nice fellow."

She had already begun to offer up her thanks that Dido was to have a deliverer from the trying day "of small things," and, I am afraid, it may be added from Mr. Benson. Her last glimpse of the room she was leaving behind her had shown her Dido sitting down to resume her single combat with the complications of the "covering," a struggle which seen in the new light which had burst upon Lady Elizabeth had something of the ludicrous in it, but by the time Dido had this confided to her she was wearing Carisbrooke's engagement ring, and was having a very different style of "covering" prepared for her by more experienced hands. Moreover, Lady Elizabeth knew that her "old set" had heard of her again, when Carisbrooke announced his coming marriage, and mentioned casually that—"My mother-in-law, Lady Elizabeth, and Mr. Benson will stay with my wife, and me, a good deal."

A Popular Widow.

By GEORGE CALVERT.

WHEN Mrs. Westmore, after a year's residence at that prettiest of pretty cottages, The Sycamores, confided to her most intimate friend, Miss Talby, and consequently to the whole population of Milford Deacon, her intention of letting two or three of her rooms by way of adding to her slender income, Milford Deacon shook its head doubtfully over cups of tea of various strength and fragrance, and wondered whether she would easily obtain a suitable lodger ; but when her modest advertisement in the local paper resulted in the arrival of Major Theodore Chernston with his goods and chattels it was good enough to signify its gracious approval of the wisdom of her proceedings.

In a small country town, where any fresh topic of conversation is a godsend—occurrences of interest, beyond the inevitable increasing and decreasing of the population, being few and far between—one cannot live for any length of time, even in the quietest and most secluded manner, without the details of one's domestic affairs becoming common property, and since Mrs. Westmore's appearance—as a pretty young widow of about thirty, though looking far less, with a bright-eyed boy of some two years of age—nine years before, she had become a familiar figure in the small society of the place.

That she was in straitened circumstances was well known, for the tiny establishment at No. 6, Bothwell Terrace was always ordered on the most economical principles ; and it says much for her tact and ability in attaining to and retaining a marked degree of popularity that when—after eight years' residence literally in their midst—she one fine day quietly and unexpectedly removed herself, her boy and her two maidservants, bag and baggage, to The Sycamores, standing in a pretty garden a mile out on the Millbridge Road, there was little of that gossiping

condemnation so apt to fly from tongue to tongue, but merely a considerable amount of good-natured curiosity as to how she would make both ends meet. It need scarcely be said that this increased and multiplied a hundredfold when Miss Talby appeared in the Rectory drawing-room one afternoon, shortly after the flitting, and, almost before she had seated herself in the proffered chair, burst out with the astounding information that she was going to keep a *man* to look after the garden and tiny paddock.

"Not to go and work there two or three days a week, but *to sleep in the house!* A *fact!* I assure you, Mrs. Markham; I had it from herself," and Miss Talby unbuttoned her jacket—she was no longer of the "airy fairy" type, and had walked in from The Sycamores at a brisk pace to impart her news—and leant back with a triumphant air, as much as to say, "What do you think of *that?*"

"My *dear* Miss Talby! you *don't say so!*"—the poppies in Miss Talby's bonnet nodded an energetic affirmative—"you don't say so!" and the rector's wife paused, sugar-tongs in hand, to gaze with mild surprise at her visitor.

"She told me herself not half an hour ago!"

"*Really!* you astonish me (let me see, two lumps, is it not?—I thought so—and a good deal of cream?); but perhaps on the whole it is not unwise. The cottage is a lonely spot at night, though a charming situation, charming!—(*do* take some teacake while it is hot. No?—some bread and butter then—this is the brown)—a little isolated, you know, so perhaps it is as well for her to have some reliable assistance within call. I must confess I have often wondered, as every one has, at her caring to live so far away from everybody."

"But"—and there was a light of triumph in the lady's eye as in that of a skilful general who, witnessing the effect of the shock of his first attack, launches forward his reserves at the critical moment to carry all before them with a resistless rush—"I have not told you yet whom she has engaged!"

"No; who is it?"

"One Kelly!"

"*Not* the——"

"The ticket-of-leave-man who has been hanging about the town for the last three weeks—yes!"

And as Mrs. Markham sat open-mouthed with astonishment, her visitor felt that her hot walk had not been taken in vain.

At many a tea-table was the news discussed that week—and for many a day afterwards—and various were the comments on Mrs. Westmore's "foolhardiness," her "temerity," her "foolishness," and the like; however, the little widow's ingratiating manners and good nature had made her many friends, and it was not so very long before "temerity" gradually became "courageous spirit," and "foolishness" was transformed into "true charitable spirit," and so on, showing that her course of action was condoned, if not approved. But even when twelve months had slipped away, during which the redoubtable Kelly might have been seen daily busying himself with the shrubbery and lawn, or digging industriously in the little kitchen garden, speculation was still rife as to what terrible record of crime lay hidden beneath his not over-prepossessing exterior, and many were the "authentic" accounts afloat—all utterly different—of his former career. On two points only did the wagging tongues agree: imprimis, that his past had been of the blackest; and secondly, that sooner or later he would confirm his evil reputation by perpetrating something dreadful—a robbery, or, "Ugh, my dear, *too horrible to think of!*"—at the cottage. Thus the news of Mrs. Westmore's having succeeded in obtaining a male tenant for her spare rooms was hailed with acclamation, and there was a distinct tone of relief observable in the criticisms freely lavished on the well-groomed, military-looking gentleman who arrived as the result of her advertisement, and settled himself and his belongings beneath her roof.

A year had passed since he had bestowed himself in his cosy quarters there—his sitting-room was the one with the bay window facing the big wellingtonia that stands at the end of the cottage next the road—and the sun was beating down rather more fiercely than an English sun is wont to do, even in August, as the major leisurely pursued his way up the High Street one morning, and having climbed the steps of the club, lingered on the topmost one, before betaking himself to his *Times*, to glance up and down the street in the careless manner of a man whose time is all his own.

Every one who has visited Milford Deacon knows Harriwell's, the stationer's shop and circulating library at the corner of the

Cattle Market and immediately opposite to the club, much patronized by the ladies of the town, and where, on almost any day of the week, between eleven and half-past one, two or three of them may be found chatting in a desultory fashion while they choose a novel or glance at the latest numbers of the magazines. This particular morning was no exception to the rule.

"Major Chernston," observed Mrs. Fernley aloud, as the gentleman in question ascended the steps opposite and paused there: she happened to be looking out of the window at the moment.

(It has been said that, from the very accurate information acquired by this lady as to her neighbours' sayings and doings, a great part of her time must have been spent in that particular occupation—but that is a mere detail.)

"Ah, yes!" assented Miss Talby, looking up from the catalogue she was somewhat listlessly studying. "Regular as usual. He is never later than twelve o'clock. What a *young* man he is!" she continued, after a minute's pause, during which the unconscious subject of her criticisms knocked the ash off his cigarette and made a half movement to betake himself indoors, but changed his mind and stayed where he was.

"Oh, Miss Talby, do you *think* so?" chimed in the third lady present, having at last after much wavering and indecision made her choice of a book; "I should have said he was *quite* an old man"—she was very youthful herself, the month-old bride of young Jenkinson of the bank—"nearly fifty, I should think."

Miss Talby sniffed indignantly—there was a reason for it—and her reply had a distinct flavour of acidity.

"Perhaps you will learn in time that there is a good deal of truth in the old saying that 'a man is just as old as he feels.'"

Mrs. Jenkinson in the innocence of her heart was on the point of inquiring if her companion knew how old Major Chernston felt, and if so, how? but a kindly Providence reminded her just in time of another old saying bearing upon the respective values of speech and silence—it was not so very long since she had given up laboriously copying this and other trite maxims with ink-stained fingers—so she refrained, and retired discreetly to register her chosen volume: at the same time a diversion was effected in her favour. "Mrs. Westmore," announced Mrs. Fernley as a figure emerged from the confectioner's some little distance down

the street and after a moment's hesitation advanced along the opposite pavement.

Although the lady of The Sycamores frankly owned to having reached the period of life popularly denoted by the three F's, no one could have imagined it to look at the trim neat figure and the freshness of the saucy face under the big hat: in her light summer dress she made a pleasant spot of coolness in the glaring sunshine, and so Theodore Chernston thought as he threw away the end of his cigarette and descended the steps, raising his hat deferentially as he took the small well-gloved hand offered to him and greeted her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Westmore; it is very brave of you to venture into the town this scorching morning; though nobody would think, to look at you, that you had had such a long dusty walk!"

"It *is* hot, isn't it? But you see shopping must be done. I think I shall lay the blame on you," she continued laughingly. "What would you say and do if you came back in the evening and found no dinner?"

"Say! why, that the pleasure of saving you trouble was well worth the sacrifice"—gallantly—"you make me feel the guiltiest and most selfish of men."

"Oh, I am *so* sorry, major! I had no idea that you had my welfare *so* much at heart."

There! again! Chernston almost jumped!

When and where on earth, in years gone by, had he seen those same melting eyes upraised with exactly the same coquettish glance and slight drooping of the long fringed lids! It was most unaccountable. He could have sworn to it, and yet in some way there was a difference which served to break the chain of memory. On his first meeting with Mrs. Westmore her face had struck him as being strangely familiar, but after racking his brain in vain for some association with it he had put it aside as a mere case of resemblance. Since then on several occasions the conviction that they had met before had flashed into his mind, but never more strongly than to-day. Suddenly he became aware that the lady was speaking, and that he had not heard a word.

"I—I beg your pardon," he interrupted her apologetically; "I am ashamed to say I did not quite catch what you said."

"Ah, major, dying to get away to your paper, I'm afraid. Luckily it was nothing worth repeating, not of half so much importance as the fact that we really shall find ourselves short of supplies if I do not get on with my errands," and with a brisk nod and cheery smile the little woman passed on, leaving him standing in the middle of the pavement looking after her with a puzzled face.

The street was too wide to allow of his expression being visible from the library window, but the direction and intensity of his gaze was unmistakable.

Said Miss Talby to Mrs. Fernley, "Major Chernston really does not look more than five-and-forty."

Said Mrs. Fernley to Miss Talby, "Upon my word Mrs. Westmore is a wonderfully young-looking woman, for her age"—and the two ladies looked at one another and smiled a smile of mutual understanding before plunging into a smart discussion of that inexhaustible theme, the merits and demerits of the local dressmaker. Ten minutes after, as they parted at the corner where their respective ways diverged, whither they had walked amicably together, Mrs. Fernley suddenly burst out, *apropos* of absolutely nothing that they had been conversing on: "After all, you know, it would be a most excellent thing!" the meaning of which her friend seemed to grasp without any explanation. "Most excellent!" assented she.

As Chernston walked homewards that evening along the Millbridge Road he was still pondering deeply over the meeting of the morning and searching the recesses of his memory to discover the meaning of his strange sense of familiarity with those laughing, upward glancing eyes. A year before it had been a matter of no particular moment to him, but, truth to tell, he had of late been thinking far more about them and their owner than he would have cared to confess. She was a wonderfully smart little woman!—wonderfully, by Jove!—and pretty too!—very; and as for age, why, what man in his senses who was just saying good-bye to his forties would think twice about any little frivolous chit of a school-girl, with no more formed ideas in her head than—pshaw! the most attractive age for a clever, witty woman was undoubtedly when she had arrived at maturity—say, thirty-five or so. How comfortable she had made him for this last year! everything invariably cosy, snug and as well

ordered as the most fastidious of men could desire! How careful she had been to anticipate all his wants and to see that all his little ways and special fancies were borne in mind and regarded—so considerate! And she was always so bright and cheerful, always good-tempered, never put out—always with a smiling greeting for him whenever he chanced to meet her; either at home, in her pretty garden, which was their common resort, or abroad in the small circle in which they both moved. Such had been the tenor of the major's thoughts for some time past, and from beginning by thinking that a man might do worse, he had suddenly awakened to the fact that his feelings had imperceptibly but unmistakably changed to such an extent that he was wholly possessed by the conviction that a man would find it very hard to do better; and, moreover, that he, the man in question, had allowed his affections to become more involved than he had thought possible at his age. That her means were small, as were his own, was a matter of small importance; he was not a mercenary man, and his few extravagances were not of a serious nature; moreover he knew from experience how pleasantly and comfortably the *ménage* could be conducted with their united resources. No, the only stumbling-block was the boy—of whom, truth to tell, he had not seen much, as he was generally away at school—and he had at length, after a searching self-examination, arrived at the conclusion that he, Theodore Chernston, was so hard hit that he was willing to undertake even that twelve-year-old encumbrance if he could but obtain the consent of the lady herself. Then had come again, on this morning, and more strongly than ever, one of those mysterious gleams of baffled recognition; and he felt perplexed and worried. On one point he was determined by the time he turned off the road and opened the white wicket gate this warm August evening, and that was to lay the matter frankly before Mrs. Westmore the very next day, and beg her to give him the clue. If there should be none forthcoming and the whole matter should resolve itself into a simple case of a striking likeness, at least it could do no harm; if the contrary—well, he would have to be guided by circumstances; so with his mind made up he went to bed and slept the sleep of the just.

On the following morning, as he sauntered up and down the neatly gravelled path in front of the cottage, smoking his after-

breakfast cigar, the major's wits were busily at work to contrive an opportunity for a *tête-à-tête* with the fair lady of his affections and perplexities; the question was, how to manage it? Within doors he was never permitted to intrude on her privacy, except by special invitation, when she entertained sundry of her friends at some mild festivity; out of doors in the garden they met often, when he, as on the present occasion, was enjoying his favourite weed, while she would appear equipped with gardening gloves and scissors to gather the flowers that daily filled the house with their summer perfume—but then they were never alone together. The space was circumscribed and words will carry long distances sometimes in the open air, and he felt that to discuss his own private affairs and fancies within possible ear-shot of an ex-convict, however thoroughly reformed, would be out of the question. Mr. Kelly, in spite of his constant attention to his work in keeping his mistress's outdoor domain in order—the place was without doubt beautifully kept—was still regarded by the world at large, that is to say, the little world of Milford Deacon, with unqualified suspicion; not even at his favourite haunt in his leisure hours in the evenings, the "Rose and Crown," did he appear to be particularly popular; though most of the *habitués* of the tap room were themselves of distinctly shady reputation. Possibly this may have been owing to the fact that though never without money from day to day for his own potations, up to a certain extent, his means came to an end nightly even before he had satisfied his own not inconsiderable thirst, leaving no margin for that necessary ceremonial of "standing a drink," by means of which so many acquaintanceships are cemented in this dry-throated land of ours. Often was he heard to grumble and curse vigorously as he searched his pockets in vain for an odd copper or two, afterwards tramping off home penniless, thirsty and sulky; yet the next evening would see him flinging down his money afresh for a limited number of glasses, to be followed by the same early and—of necessity, not from choice—sober retirement; never did he arrive with empty pockets or leave with a penny in them. The subject of his wages and their payment was often discussed at the "Rose and Crown" in his absence; in his presence never, since one occasion on which he had checked, with more force than politeness and with a resentment which left a lasting impression, the tipsy

inquisitiveness of a toper whose curiosity had got the better of his prudence.

Still, as a servant he was presumably a success, for no one had ever heard a word of complaint from his mistress concerning him ; and certainly in his gardening work he was indefatigable—too indefatigable, the major thought this morning as he watched him laboriously clipping the edges of the grass ; and he wished him anywhere else. The sun was hot, and beads of perspiration stood on the man's brow as he moved slowly along in his stooping constrained position, and as the watcher noticed it and marked the trembling hands and dry lips, the flushed face and bloodshot eyes, an idea flashed into his head ; he read the signs correctly and saw his opportunity. In a moment his hand was in his pocket and two or three strides brought him to the other's side.

"Warmish work, that of yours, on a day like this," he remarked carelessly.

"Worse nor that," was the sullen response.

"And dry, I take it ?"

"Ay, sir, yer may well say that"—distinctly more civilly.

"Ah, I daresay. I'd sooner you had to do it than I." He chinked the loose silver in his pocket as he spoke and chuckled inwardly as he saw him involuntarily moisten his lips. "I shouldn't wonder if you could find a use for these now," he continued suggestively, holding out a couple of half-crowns as he spoke.

The man's eyes gleamed, but to Chernston's surprise he cast a hurried look at the house and made no motion to accept them.

"Askin' yer pardon, sir, if you wouldn't mind laying them on the garden seat, there," he almost whispered eagerly, "I'll take 'em as I go by, and thank yer kindly."

"What the devil do you mean ; you've got a pocket to put them in, haven't you ?" The major spoke angrily but did not withdraw his hand.

The other hesitated for a second, glanced once again apprehensively at windows and doors, then with quick stealthiness fairly snatched at the coins and in a moment was bending over his work afresh a couple of yards away without a word of acknowledgment. The donor looked at him curiously and was about to speak but checked himself, and with a slight shrug of his

shoulders turned away, cigar in mouth, to resume his leisurely saunter, leaving his spell to work as it would. And work it did; for scarcely had he taken half-a-dozen turns up and down before he saw the slouching form of the ex-knight of the broad arrow disappearing towards the rear of the premises, and two minutes later the click of the back gate and a glimpse of a battered straw hat above the hedge apprized him that his design had succeeded and that, for a time, the coast was clear. So far, good; but here his luck seemed to have deserted him. The minutes passed; a fresh cigar was lighted and nearly consumed—and still he had the place to himself. Ten minutes!—Twenty minutes!—Half an hour! He was beginning to fear at every turn the reappearance of the refreshed owner of the hat. Forty minutes! His patience was nearly—very nearly—exhausted, when, at the French window of her little drawing-room, the long expected and familiar figure at last appeared.

As he stepped forward to meet her and she responded to his greeting with all her characteristic brightness he thought he had never seen Mrs. Westmore looking younger or prettier. A cool plain white dress set off the rounded figure to perfection; she was without a hat, and her profusion of soft brown hair was coiled and piled artistically on the top of her well-shaped head, shaded from the hot morning sun by a dainty parasol which added a becoming glow to the bloom of her complexion. But there was no time to waste in admiring her, the minutes were flying fast, so the major plunged gallantly *in medias res*.

"Mrs. Westmore," he commenced, "I have a question to ask you."

"A question! Dear me, how solemn you are about it. I hope it is nothing disagreeable."

"I trust not." He was impatient and a little flurried and made use of the first words that rose to his lips. "Can you tell me when and where we first met?"

Awkwardly worded enough, yet surely intelligible. Why, then, did the lady turn her head away so abruptly and examine with such an appearance of interest a rose bush which she must have seen many a hundred times before, while a full minute elapsed before her reply came, hesitatingly:

"What a very strange question, Major Chernston. Do—do you think I am likely to forget your arrival here?"

A question, not an answer, or at best an evasive one ; but he did not notice it, or if he did he entirely misinterpreted its meaning. What he did notice were the sudden shy turning away, the downcast look, the hesitation, and above all the quick blush that dyed neck and cheek ; he noticed all these ; became conscious of a strange thumping of his heart which had been a stranger to him for many a year—and did what a much more diffident man might have been encouraged to do under the circumstances, seized the little hand that hung idly down close to his own and imprinted on it a fervent kiss, and then——

Then the major received the greatest shock he had ever had in his life.

Before the hand could be withdrawn, before he had time even to catch a glimpse of the astounded face turned towards him, there was a rustling in the bushes behind them, a heavy footstep on the gravel, and he felt a gin-laden breath upon his cheek and a rough hand upon his shoulder, while a hoarse voice—slightly hoarser, thicker and more indistinct, but unmistakably the same which had thanked him kindly three-quarters of an hour before—growled in his ear :

"S'elp me, yer call yerself a gent, do yer ! D—— yer, let my wife be."

And then occurred one of those utter breakdowns of conventional decorum, one of those sudden flingings to the winds of petty artificialities which do sometimes come to pass in moments of intense rage ; the hand was torn from his grasp, and the pretty mouth that he so much admired, trembling with passion, hissed out shrilly :

"Now the fat *is* in the fire ; you've done it now and no mistake, you ugly drunken beast."

"Drunken beast, indeed !"—the hoarse voice was unsteady and the gin-bred courage was evidently ready to die away at the first breath of the storm of feminine wrath visible in every line of the small white-clad figure—"it were a different tale to that fourteen years ago when Polly Roper were rare an' glad to go to church wi' me ; it were 'dear Jack'—'handsome Jack' then—. Drunken beast!—ay, it's always that now," with a distinctly tearful tendency.

Then from the rosy lips came an outpouring of home truths couched in terse and vigorous language, in which a spade was

unmistakably mentioned as such, which completely overflowed and drowned the maudlin reproaches and feeble protests vaguely interposed in response ; and with a vision before his eyes of a red parasol cast recklessly aside in the grass and of a small woman drawn up to her full height with clenched fists and heaving bosom, seeming to tower above the shambling figure in front of her—with a background of a frightened maidservant drinking in the scene with eyes and ears—the major silently and rapidly beat a retreat to his own quarters, where, mechanically locking the door, he sank into his favourite chair in a state of utter mental collapse, gasping incoherently :

“Polly Roper !”

* * * * *

As the up mail tore onwards towards the great city that night, shrieking through sleepy wayside stations and lighting up cavernous tunnels with its glowing breath, in a snug first-class compartment a middle-aged gentleman closed his eyes and dreamed a dream :

And behold ! a quarter of a century was rolled away, and it was night, and the place was a lofty hall, in a vast metropolis, lighted with many lights. And there was there a great multitude of men and of women—and seats tier above tier—and much gilding and carving and upholstery of plush—and the air was heavy laden with many scents, of gas and of tobacco, of patchouli and of whisky hot. And in front of a great platform did musicians discourse sweet music, and anon they would cease their playing ; then would a voice be heard as of a stout man in evening dress, saying, “Ladies and gentlemen ! Miss —— will now appear.” And behold, a great counter of mahogany, behind the which was store of drink ; of wine, of malt liquor, and of ardent spirits, and of lemons and the such like not a few. And on the counter leaned a youth, and the face was like unto his own face, but fresh and young, and somewhat flushed and the eyes very bright ; and in his hand a tumbler, and in his mouth a weed ; and he spoke much and smiled to one who served. And she was passing fair and very skilful in the compounding of strange drinks, and her form was that of a goddess—though full young—and her voice was sweet and low when she remarked that it was “’ot.”

And as she spoke to the youth she looked upward in his face, as one coquetting, and lo ! her eyes were wondrous soft and melting, and the eyelids, as it were, drooped a little, and the fringe of the eyelashes was long and dark and curving ; and about her brow a wealth of delicate hair——

And the middle-aged gentleman stirred in his sleep and murmured :

“ Ah ! it was golden then ! ”

Luke Maitland's Last Call.

By S. SELOUS.

A LARGE winter party in a rambling old house on the Thames is no doubt a delightful thing in the abstract, but if the party is not a carefully selected one, or there happen to be wheels within wheels, the consequences may be extremely disagreeable. Perhaps Miss Grace Furnival's feelings may be imagined when she discovered that her brother had invited to Walworth Court not only the rich man to whom she had just publicly plighted her troth, but the poor man to whom for nearly a year she had been secretly engaged.

"You don't mean to say you've asked Luke Maitland!" gasped Grace, on hearing the unwelcome tidings.

"And why shouldn't I?" growled Tom, aggressively; "he's as good a sort as any fellow I know; there are only three things against him—he's poor, he's high-shouldered, and he is much too fond of you."

"Indeed! and how do you know that last?"

"Because I met him yesterday and told him about your engagement to old Smithson—you should have seen him, Grace—I thought the poor devil was going to faint! What fools men are! If he knew you a little better——"

Tom paused and whistled expressively.

"What brutes brothers are!" reflected Grace; then, with a caressing tone she seldom wasted on Tom, "If you really think poor Luke is fond of me, won't you put off his visit, dear? It can hardly be agreeable to him to be here at the same time as dear Edward."

"Dear Edward be blowed!" was Tom's vigorous remark. "Luke is my friend, and I'm not going to interfere with him; if *he* doesn't mind coming it's not my concern—it's his look out."

Grace sighed with an injured martyr expression and resigned herself to the inevitable. The inevitable was disagreeable—it

usually is, but she could see a way out of it. She would herself get rid of the inconvenient Luke; she had always found him very properly obedient, he would no doubt prove so on this occasion as on every other. Luke was coming on Friday; Edward, by a providential rush of business, was detained in the City until Saturday. There was time to get rid of the old love before the new one arrived.

Grace looked at her handsome features in the glass, and a certain wise old proverb presented itself obtrusively to her mind.

"It is best to be off with the old love before you are on with the new," sighed the young lady; then, apostrophizing the mirror: "What a fool I've been to get myself into this mess! I've been very weak not to break with poor Luke before, but it was an amiable weakness—I hope he'll give me credit for it, and not make himself too objectionable over what can't be avoided."

Grace Furnival was only one-and-twenty when she engaged herself to "poor Luke;" she had been very fond then of the handsome young fellow, but this fondness had not blinded her pretty eyes to the main chance, and she had only promised to marry him on the condition of absolute secrecy.

Luke was a struggling novelist, and if his struggles continued to be fruitless and his novels publisherless, Grace argued, with an acumen that did credit to her head at least, that it would be easier for her to accomplish a brilliant marriage if she were not hampered by a public engagement to such an ineligible as Luke.

Luke Maitland was one of those men who, unless mercifully provided at their birth with a wealthy father and an unencumbered estate, are bound to be failures, and poverty-stricken failures into the bargain. He had more heart than head; he was credulous, dreamy, absolutely impractical; his views of life were absurdly impossible; he practised what he preached, and he preached—over the heads of his fellow men. How could such a man ever hope for success or happiness? His friends said the young man had a twist in his brain, a tile loose; this was no doubt a comforting theory, and explained the many acts of quixotism which otherwise might have galled his companions with a sense of contrast.

Such a man as this was like wax in the hands of Grace

Furnival; he was madly in love with her, and he believed in her as primitive man believes in his fetish.

* * * * *

The guests arrived at Walworth Court on Friday; Luke Maitland, Colonel and Mrs. Cross, still so newly married as to render all abrupt entrances into dark corners equally dangerous and embarrassing, Miss Askew, a pretty little brunette especially provided for Tom's amusement, and Lawrence Gould, a young barrister, briefless of course, but supposed to possess the makings of a future Lord Chancellor. Added to the Furnival family of six this made quite a large party, and Mrs. Furnival had been anxious about the dinner: her housewifely bosom had been torn all day by doubts as to whether she had really chosen for the best in giving the preference to lobster cutlets over an *entrée* of oysters and cream, while poor Grace had been worried to death by a constant repetition of the anxious formula:

"Do you really think there's enough in the house to go over Sunday, my dear?" or, "I hope you think I've got a good dinner, Grace—Mr. Gould is so particular, and these legal men do eat such a lot! Now let me just go over what I've got; white soup and *croûtons*, filleted sole *pané*"—and so on, and so on, until Grace sought refuge in her room, too anxious about her own private concerns to take a properly lively interest in the *menu*.

The guests arrived late, and Miss Furnival's toilet was a protracted one. It was an embarrassing moment for her when she sailed into the drawing-room and greeted the man whom she knew she had treated abominably.

Luke Maitland stopped abruptly in his conversation with the barrister, who had been questioning him in a manner irritatingly suggestive of the witness box, and stood, white and trembling, his sunken eyes fixed on the glistening white vision advancing towards him, quite heedless of the fact that he had left his sentence unfinished and attracted the attention of almost everybody in the room.

Though Grace might feel uncomfortable she was equal to the occasion: "So pleased to see you, Mr. Maitland—such ages since we met! How is your mother? she must feel this cold very trying;" and then the pretty white dress which was so

adorned by the lovely figure inside it moved on to the further corner of the room where the Crosses had ensconced themselves, and Luke suddenly woke up to the knowledge that there were other people present besides Grace, and that a man's first duty to society is to smile and look pleasant, whatever vulture of despair may be gnawing at his heart.

Dinner was an ordeal for both Luke and Grace; even Tom felt uncomfortable when he saw his friend's miserable face, and wished he had cancelled his invitation, while an instinctive feeling that something was wrong hung upon the spirits of the other guests. Mr. Furnival hated society and heartily wished himself away; Mrs. Furnival was still beset by doubts and fears as to the intrinsic superiority of lobster cutlets, and only breathed freely when the ample justice done to that *entrée* ratified her own judgment, while the younger members of the Furnival family considered themselves aggrieved by the length of the dinner and the absence of their favourite pudding.

Grace tried hard to avert the awkward pauses which would suddenly cut short the constrained dribble of small talk; but try as she would to hunt up new topics of conversation and to lend an attentive ear to Gould's appallingly legal anecdotes, she was ever conscious of Luke Maitland's white face across the table. By an evil chance he had been placed exactly opposite to her, and his great brown eyes, full of a dreadful look of appeal and despair, hardly wandered from her face. That fixed, reproachful gaze was almost more than she could bear; she had a nightmare-like feeling of being unable to speak or move; she dared not meet his eyes, and yet she was never free from the consciousness of them. Would dinner never end! White as her dress, Grace leaned back in her chair; she was conscious that the barrister was speaking to her and expected an intelligent answer, but she did not hear one word he said, and could not have answered if she had.

Ah! Mrs. Furnival was rising—this ordeal would come to an end at last.

The ladies rose from their chairs with a rustling and whirring as of a covey of partridges. Luke Maitland opened the door, and as Grace passed him he whispered in her ear, under cover of a sudden quarrel for precedence between the younger Furnivals:

"I must see you to-night—tell me where and when——"

"At nine—in the library," was Grace's prompt reply, as she stooped to pick up her handkerchief.

Luke Maitland waited half-an-hour in the gloomy, book-lined room before Grace joined him. She closed the door carefully behind her, drew a chair close to the fire, shivering and spreading out her hands to the cheerful blaze, for it was the seventeenth of February and the night was bitterly cold.

Luke leaned against the mantelpiece and looked down at her, at her glorious pile of chestnut hair, at her finely cut features and pretty white hands. His lips trembled—he could not trust himself to speak.

"Well," said Grace, glancing up at him, "what do you want to say to me? I can't stay here long."

Luke steadied his shaking lips with an effort.

"I want to know the truth—I want to know if you are still the woman I have worshipped, or if you are something else, a different being to what I have ever imagined you."

"Would you mind descending to my level and common prose, and telling me exactly what you want to know in plain English?" said Grace mockingly.

"In plain English, are you engaged to Edward Smithson as well as to me? In plain English, are you a heartless jilt?"

Grace looked at him curiously.

"I answer 'yes' to both those questions. Call me as many hard names as you like; I deserve them."

The contrition in her voice and eyes softened him at once. He caught her hands in his and drew her passionately to him.

"Grace, why have you treated me like this? Why did you leave me in my fool's paradise only to be awakened to this? Why do you marry this man? You don't love him! You love me."

"No, not now," said Grace, quietly drawing her hands away; "I did love you a year ago, but a year is a long time, you know. I could never have married you; you must know very well that you will never be rich enough to keep a wife. Mr. Smithson is rich, and I am quite fond enough of him; I shall marry him next June."

"Is this your final decision, Grace?" said Luke, in an unsteady voice.

"Yes, it is my final decision."

"You don't love me? My dearest, are you sure? Can you honestly tell me you don't love me?"

"Honestly and truly, Luke," and there was a tone of absolute inflexibility in her low voice.

There was silence for some moments. A wintry moon was shining fitfully upon the thick snow outside; the wind had risen and was growling round the house like an angry dog. Luke drew a handkerchief from his pocket and passed it across his wet forehead. It was a white silk handkerchief with a blue border, the initials "L. M." conspicuously embroidered in each corner. Grace's eyes rested on it for a moment, and a little flush of colour came into her pale cheeks. Luke saw it and smiled.

"Ah, you recognize it—the handkerchief you embroidered for me only a year ago! It has lasted longer than your love." He put it carefully back into his pocket.

"Grace," he said, fixing his dark eyes on hers with a wistful look that touched her cold heart, "I suppose you think I am taking this very easy; the blow has paralyzed me—my brain seems stunned—but if it will be any consolation to your vanity to know that you have broken my heart and ruined my life, that consolation may be thoroughly your own."

The young man's words were a trifle melodramatic; they reminded Grace of speeches out of his own novels, and she gave a light little laugh.

"Hearts are not so easily broken, my dear Luke."

He turned upon her, his cheeks livid, his eyes flashing.

"And you can laugh! You destroy not only my love but my faith—you deprive me of my ideal and trample on my illusions, and then you laugh at the ruin you have made! Heartless and shameless! I could kill you now without compunction." He raised his hand, and Grace shrank back with a low cry of terror. His hand dropped at his side. "No, that would be no vengeance," he murmured half audibly. "Don't be afraid, Grace; I won't touch you."

She rose to her feet, horribly frightened, and crept towards the door. Luke opened it for her courteously.

"I hope you will enjoy your honeymoon," he said; "you needn't be afraid of my creating disturbances and opening Mr Smithson's eyes—I shall start to-night on a long journey—on a long journey," he repeated, fixing his eyes on Grace's with a

singular expression, "but don't be afraid, you will see me quite soon enough—I shall often return and call on your husband; yes, I shall make a point of returning," said Luke, with a laugh. The laugh was such an uncanny one and the look on the young man's face so very strange and creepy, that Grace lost all sense of dignity in the terror that seized her, and fairly took to her heels.

She did not feel safe until she had reached the furthest wing of the rambling house and ensconced herself in the drawing-room near to her brother. Tom was a young brute certainly, but there was a sense of protection and comfort in his presence.

"Where have you been all this time?" asked Tom; he was a young man with a talent for asking awkward questions.

Grace glanced at the clock, half-past ten—she had been away an hour. "I have been up in my room," she faltered, aware that Miss Askew was eyeing her curiously; "my head was aching so."

"I believe you are telling the truth for once," said Tom ungraciously; "you look as bad as bad can be. Now, Miss Askew, let's go on with our game—never mind Grace, she's all right. That's my fourth knave—pay me one—I'm bound to win now."

With a sigh of relief Grace watched the young people relapse into the thrilling intellectuality of "beggar your neighbour;" but she was not left to herself for long. Mr. Gould came up with a plea for "just one song, Miss Furnival—now you really must, you know."

Having thus skilfully broken the ice, Mr. Gould was able to lead up to the subject of his own singing, of which he was very proud; and soon Grace found herself installed at the piano to play his accompaniments, and realized with despair that she was likely to remain there for the whole evening.

She was thankful indeed when Mrs. Furnival rose from the armchair in which she had been snugly dozing and declared it was time to go to bed. But Tom nipped her thankfulness in the bud.

"Nonsense, mother," he declared; "it's only half-past eleven; who ever heard of going to bed before twelve! Miss Askew has set her heart on a game of pool—haven't you, Miss Askew? What heart you have, you know, for you can't have much, or you wouldn't have beaten me so badly. Come along, Grace—it's all

nonsense about your head—you've got to play pool. Come along, Gould—off we go!"

The spoilt and impetuous Tom led the way to the billiard room, the others following meekly.

"Won't Colonel and Mrs. Cross play?" suggested his sister; "they can take my place."

"Not they," retorted Tom, "they're no good; they can't do anything but spoon in corners and make a fellow feel deuced awkward. Where's Luke, though? he's a good hand at pool. Anybody seen Luke Maitland?" Nobody answered. "D'you know where he is, Grace?"

"No."

"Perhaps he's in his room. I'll go and see." Tom returned in a few minutes. "No, he's not there. Where can the fellow be? He can't have gone for a walk this freezing night. I'll hunt him out, though—the more the merrier. He may be in the library, now I think of it—Luke's a regular bookworm." And off went the energetic youth.

This time he returned almost immediately, and as he burst into the room they all rose in alarm, for it was plain to see that something had happened. Tom's face was white—horrified, his hair was standing erect on his head, his mouth hung open, his whole frame shook. Miss Askew clung to his arm, trembling.

"What is it?" she cried. "Oh, what is it?"

Tom fell into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"It is too awful!" he gasped; "too horrible! Poor Luke! Oh, my God! I can't forget his face!"

Grace shook him almost fiercely.

"Why can't you speak plainly, Tom? Is he dead?"

"Dead as a door-nail. But somebody go and fetch a doctor. Gould, you'd better go and cut him down"—a strong shudder shook him—"I—I couldn't stop there—I—I can't look at it again."

Gould left the room hastily; Miss Askew quietly fainted on the sofa, but soon revived under the powerful restorative of absolute inattention. Grace stood beside her brother, calm, but with an ashy face. The barrister returned in a few moments; he looked almost as pale and shaken as the younger man.

"It's only too true, Miss Furnival; poor Maitland is dead. I've sent for a doctor, but there's not a spark of life in him. Very painful occurrence, very—sudden insanity, I suppose."

"And how—how——?" Grace's dry lips could not frame the question.

"Hanged himself," answered Tom, looking up with horrified eyes; "hanged himself behind the door with the very embroidered handkerchief I saw in his hand at dinner to-day—his initials in all the corners; expect some woman gave it him, poor devil. Did you see his face, Gould, with the moonlight on it?" The barrister nodded, with a shudder. "I shall never forget it," gasped Tom—"the head hanging on one shoulder, the eyes starting out of the blackened face, and the mouth twisted up in that awful grin——"

"Hush!" said Gould quickly; "hold your tongue, man—your sister's fainting!"

* * * * *

Grace Furnival was a cold and somewhat heartless woman, but Luke Maitland's death and the terrible manner of it was a severe shock to her. She was ill for many weeks with a kind of nervous fever, and when she recovered, the first thing she did was to put off her marriage with Edward Smithson. She wished to delay it until July twelvemonth, but this her lover would not hear of—it must be that year or not at all. Grace yielded, though unwillingly, and they were married on the 20th of December at the little church at Sonning. It was a grand wedding; the church was crowded and the presents were numerous. The bride looked white and haggard, but her dress came from Paris and the train thereof was the longest ever seen in Sonning! This was a triumph for any bride to achieve, and no doubt Grace enjoyed it.

As the "happy pair" drove from Paddington to Victoria (their honeymoon was to be spent on the Riviera), Grace noticed that her husband cast many glances out of the window.

"What is it, Edward?" she asked; "what are you looking at?"

"I was only looking to see if that fellow is still following us—I suppose he thinks we are going to a private house and wants to help with the boxes. He's been after us ever since we left Paddington."

Grace looked out of the window in her turn.

"I don't see any one, Edward."

"I daresay he's hanging on to the back of our cab—like his impudence!"

The subject was dismissed and the man forgotten for the moment. But two days later, when Mr. and Mrs. Smithson were comfortably established in a luxurious *coupé* on the night express from Paris to Marseilles, Grace was startled out of her sleep by hearing her husband exclaim:

"There's that man again!"

Grace opened her eyes sleepily.

"Where?" she asked.

"There, hanging on to the door—his face against the window. Good God! how did he get there? he'll be killed."

"It must be the ticket collector," said Grace.

"With the train going full speed? no—impossible!"

"Is he still there?" gasped she.

"Yes, of course; are you blind?"

"I can't see him," said his wife, straining her eyes into the outer dimness.

"Can't see him? why he's there all the time, as large as life."

The little blind was drawn over the lamp in the ceiling, leaving the carriage in darkness; any face outside the window would have been distinctly visible, but Grace could see nothing. She gave a little shudder.

"You must be ill, Edward—there is nothing there. Tell me what he is like."

"I can't see him distinctly—his head seems hanging over on his shoulder, and there's something white round his throat—a handkerchief, I think. Ah, he's gone—good heavens! he must have jumped off—he'll be smashed."

But Mr. Smithson's horrified speculations as to the fate of the mysterious stranger were terminated abruptly by the discovery that his wife had fainted.

This was the commencement of the Smithsons' honeymoon, and as it had commenced so it went on. Grace was at no loss now to interpret the meaning of Luke Maitland's last words. There was no doubt that he made a point of returning; wherever the Smithsons went that silent figure followed. What almost added to the horror of it was that Grace herself never saw him; he might be at her elbow, and yet she was unconscious of his presence until some chance word revealed it.

"Who's your high-shouldered friend, Mrs. Smithson?" asked an American acquaintance one day as they watched the *rouge-et-noir* tables in the gambling rooms at Monte Carlo. "I never see you and your husband without him, and yet the strange thing is I've never seen his face or met him by himself."

Grace faltered out some answer and changed the conversation; but the American was not to be silenced, for presently he looked round, started, and said, with interest in his voice:

"Why, he's there now—just behind you—queer-looking fellow! I can't make out his face—it seems twisted on one side and it's half hidden by a handkerchief. Good gracious, Mrs. Smithson, are you ill?"

Perhaps it was hardly surprising that Grace Smithson became ill; she did not suffer from any specific malady, but she could neither eat nor sleep; her cheeks grew white and sunken, her eyes hollow.

"I must take you back to England, Grace," said her husband, but she shuddered and begged to stay abroad till the spring. If Luke Maitland haunted them abroad perhaps he would haunt them doubly at home; here, at all events, she could have her husband almost constantly with her, in England his business would take him away all day; she dreaded being alone. And so February came round again and found the Smithsons at Monte Carlo.

Edward Smithson was still a devoted husband, but one evening, Grace feeling too ill to go out, he was conscious of being a trifle dull and went off to the tables.

"Don't be long, Edward," pleaded Grace. "I can't bear to be alone."

"I shan't be half-an-hour, my darling."

But the half-hour became an hour, and Mr. Smithson did not return.

Grace sat by the window and looked out across the moonlit gardens; it was a bitterly cold season at Monte Carlo; the snow lay on the ground, and the wind growled fitfully through the evergreen oaks. There was a fire in her sitting-room, but Grace shivered and drew her cloak closer round her. She rose and went to the table for a book. A little calendar was lying there; she glanced at it—the seventeenth of February. Good God! it was the anniversary of Luke Maitland's death! She shook from

head to foot and glanced furtively over her shoulder, half expecting to see some dreadful thing, but there was nothing there. But an awful feeling of terror was on her. She opened the door and went out into the corridor, thinking she would call the maid on some pretext. In the room opposite her own there was loud talk and laughter, and the lively popping of corks. The sounds re-assured her; she felt less cut off from humanity and half ashamed of her fears—she would go back again. She pushed open the door, but it resisted and felt curiously heavy under her trembling hand; its action seemed impeded by some heavy weight. She opened it, however, and it swung back behind her, closing loudly under the sudden impetus. Some dark object was hanging on the door; with a heart that had almost stopped beating, Grace stood and looked. It was a dark, dimly seen figure, the head hanging over upon one shoulder; a faint ray of moonlight touched the face—it was the face of a dead man. A white handkerchief was tightened under the blackened throat, the eyes started forward in a blind glassy stare, the mouth was twisted in a ghastly grin. It was the face of Luke Maitland as Tom had described it.

When Mr. Smithson came in half-an-hour later he found his wife rigid and unconscious. He too saw the awful figure hanging on the door; the glassy eyes seemed staring into his; there was a horrible malignity in the distorted grin. He gazed, fascinated, then a moan from Grace drew his eyes away. When he looked up again the figure had gone. Luke Maitland was never seen again; he had made his last call.

But his revenge was complete. When, after months of illness, Grace at last recovered her reason and health, her chestnut hair was white as snow. What greater vengeance could he have desired on a pretty woman?

A Romance of Modern London.

By CURTIS YORKE,

Author of "HUSH!" "THE MYSTERY OF BELGRAVE SQUARE," "THE
BROWN PORTMANTEAU," "DUDLEY," "THE WILD RUTHVENS,"
"THAT LITTLE GIRL," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH BEE IS FAITHFUL.

"Some there be that shadows kiss,
Such have but a shadow's bliss!"

.....

"If I had known, O loyal heart,
When, hand to hand, we said farewell,
How for all time our paths would part,
What shadow o'er our friendship fell—
I should have stayed my foolish tears,
And hushed each idle sigh and moan,
To bid you a long last God-speed,
If I had known!"

.....

In the silence of her little bed a sweeping revulsion of feeling came over Bee. She felt ashamed—angry with herself that for one moment she could have entertained the idea of marrying Mr. Treherne.

Ah, it was no use disguising her heart from herself. Why should she? Worthy or unworthy—she still loved Douglas Conrath. And as he did not want to marry her, she would marry no one else. And that was "the conclusion of the whole matter." After a fit of passionate crying she fell asleep, and dreamed that she and Douglas were together again in Garth Street.

All the next day she felt horribly nervous. Every footstep that passed the schoolroom door, every touch on the handle, made her heart leap to her throat, in anticipation of the inevitable interview that awaited her. Winifred's announcement from the window, that "father was going out for a ride on the brown horse" quieted her somewhat. He would not return, she knew, for at least a couple of hours.

But when the children had gone to bed, and she was alone, her nervousness came back again. She was very grieved and unhappy. Of course she would have to go away—to drift out into the world again. *Why* need Mr. Treherne have fallen in love with her? Was there anything but wretchedness and disappointment in all this miserable world?

A step in the passage without. Mr. Treherne had come into the room. He had shut the door. He was close beside her. Without speaking any word of formal greeting, he took her hand in the warm close clasp of his, and said, a trifle unsteadily,

"I have come, you see—for my answer."

That was all.

A curious faintness came over Bee. She tried to speak, but somehow the words would not come. The next moment she felt his arm thrown round her, and heard his voice, tender and impassioned, say,

"My dear, how white you are! What is it? Speak to me. Tell me that you will give yourself to me—that you will be my wife?" She found her voice then, and stepped back from him.

"No," she said, in a quick breathless kind of way—"I have thought—I have decided. It is quite impossible that I can be your wife."

A brief silence throbbed through the room.

Then Treherne said coldly,

"So be it. Do not look so distressed, pray. I—might have known."

"I—I am sorry——" began Bee, raising her eyes to his.

A swift spasm shot across his face; his right hand closed involuntarily on the back of a chair that stood near. He had grown white about the mouth.

"That will do," he said quietly. "I am aware that you are in no way to blame."

Then he turned and went out of the room.

Bee shivered. He could be cruel—horribly cruel—this man who could be so tender too. She was glad she had refused him. She felt, once more, a swift pang of sorrow for the dead Mrs. Treherne.

On the following afternoon Bee met Treherne in the hall. He was just leaving his study.

"May I speak to you, Mr. Treherne?" she said nervously.

"Certainly," he answered with cold courtesy.

They entered the study together, and he closed the door and placed a chair for her. He himself remained standing. He looked much as usual, with the exception of an added rigidity of manner and expression. But he was deeply offended, Bee could see; and the knowledge did not lessen her nervousness.

"I wanted to speak to you, Mr. Treherne," she said in a low, uncertain voice—"I wanted to tell you that—that I think it will be better for me to give up my situation as governess to your children."

He looked at her in silence for a moment or two. Then he said quietly,

"Yes—it will be better. I anticipated that you—would decide on doing so."

There was a slight—a very slight—tremor in his voice, quiet though it was. Bee's heart swelled unaccountably. He might have shown some regret, she thought. Forgetting that he might prefer showing none to showing too much. And not knowing the strong restraint he was putting upon himself.

"It is a great grief to me—having to leave the children, and Mrs. Enderton, and—and you," she murmured, her lip trembling. "You have all been very good and kind to me."

He smiled somewhat bitterly.

"You will pardon me if I doubt your grief," he said. "Your going or staying depended entirely upon yourself. You have chosen to go. There is therefore nothing more to be said. Of course I am aware that, under the circumstances your remaining would be awkward and unpleasant for us both. Indeed it would be out of the question. We will now, if you please, drop the subject. If there is anything I can do for you—if I can be of any use in obtaining any other post for you——" He paused. "Voices are sometimes unruly, you know."

"Thank you—you are very kind," faltered Bee.

Presently Treherne went on,

"I am leaving town to-morrow, and as I shall not return for a month or so, I fear I cannot hope to see you again. I will, therefore, say good-bye to you now."

Bee stood up.

"Good-bye," she said simply.

"One moment," said Treherne, in a curiously suppressed voice.

"Your decision is—quite final?"

"Quite final," was the unsteady answer.

He bowed silently. Then he opened the door for her, and she passed out.

Mrs. Enderton was honestly grieved at the prospect of losing Bee's bright young companionship. She had a pretty good guess as to the reason, of course. But the subject was tacitly avoided between them. The old lady, as a matter of fact, was much offended that this struggling little governess should have refused her clever good-looking nephew. To be sure she would have been equally offended had Bee accepted him. The girl felt the change in the atmosphere, and was nervously anxious to get away.

She answered several advertisements, and left her name at two registry offices. She did not apply again to Dr. Canns, feeling sure he would ask her why she had left Curzon Street.

Nobody, it appeared, was in immediate want of a governess. At least no one wanted anything less than a well-crammed young person in that capacity—which Bee was not. One day, however, Mrs. Enderton called her into the drawing-room, and said in the slightly formal tone in which she always addressed her now,

"I think I have heard of a situation that may suit you, Miss Somers. A friend of mine has written to me asking if I can recommend a young lady competent to take entire charge of a little girl about three years old. Some friends of hers in Wales have asked her to make inquiries for them." She then went on to give Bee a *résumé* of her probable duties.

"It seems very suitable," said the girl eagerly. "Do you not think so?"

"I do. Were I you I should try to secure it. Of course I need not tell you that my nephew and myself will satisfactorily answer any inquiries that may be made," she concluded somewhat stiffly.

"The people are called Conrath," she added glancing over a letter she held. "The name of their place is Berstwith Manor. The child is their grand-niece. Her mother is dead, and her father is abroad."

Bee's face flushed crimson, then became deathly pale. For a minute the room seemed to be running a mad circular race round her swimming head. To take care of Douglas's little daughter? The prospect seemed very sweet—very tempting.

Douglas was away. No one would know her. She made up her mind quickly. If she could get this situation she would take it.

And so it came to pass that some three weeks later, she bade farewell to her weeping little pupils, and turned her face towards Wales. At Paddington the first thing that met her eyes was the placarded announcement at the bookstall of "Douglas Conrath's new one volume novel." Need I say that she at once possessed herself of a copy?

* * * *

And Douglas himself, then? Had he indeed forgotten all about her?—or wilfully neglected her?—as she fancied he had. Do you think it was likely? If you take a slight retrospect with me, you shall see. It so chanced that he returned to England some little time after Bee left Camden Town. (For this is how fate too often uses us poor mortals.) The little cottage was empty, dreary, deserted. Neither the house-agent nor any one in the neighbourhood could give him any definite information, save that the "old lady" was dead. Miss Adeane was by some supposed to have gone to "furrin parts," by others to have "taken a situation," and by yet others, to be married. Half mad with suspense and anxiety, Conrath put carefully-worded advertisements in all the principal papers, and ate his heart out while waiting for replies. But as Bee at this time was ill in bed and unable even to look at papers, he waited in vain. At last, sick at heart, he went down to Wales, in obedience to a longing to see his baby-daughter, who was now nearly eighteen months old.

As far as a child of that age can be said to resemble any one, she resembled her dead mother. At times, indeed, the resemblance was almost startling. It haunted Douglas, and made him uncomfortable. To the dismay of his uncle and aunt he only remained a few months in England. And during these months he never relaxed his fruitless search for Bee. But she, being merged in the identity of Katherine Somers, unconsciously eluded him. Thus at last he gave up all hope, and torn between restless miserable anxiety on one hand, and bitter resentment as to her ignoring his claim to take care of her on the other hand, he set off on his travels again, and for many a long day England saw him no more.

His best book, I think, was published while he was wandering

to and fro under blazing foreign skies. At least the majority of his critics considered it his best. Others again said it was his worst. It sold better than any of the others—if that is any criterion of merit.

His agents at Poldornalupe wrote him that the mine was prospering amazingly. So it is that Fortune smiles—nay, grins upon us—when we don't care two straws whether she cuts us dead for the term of our natural lives or not. This is a problem which it is impossible to solve. The wise man, therefore, will not attempt it.

But in spite of his fame and prosperity, these wandering years held for him an inexpressible dreariness. Bee's utter disappearance was terrible to him. The thought that she might be ill, or in want, or among people who were unkind to her, haunted him night and day. That she might be married he never allowed himself to think for more than an instant. That one swift flash of her eyes in which he had read her love for him was with him always. Nevertheless—she was a woman—and women may change. The most persistent thought that held him was that she was dead. Otherwise, it seemed to him that he *must* have found her.

* * * * *

In the wild Australian bush a man lay dying. Another man knelt beside him, his face grey with watching and anxiety and recent sickness. A rough log-hut sheltered them, through whose chinks the rays of a hard silver moon filtered uncertainly, casting grotesque black shadows on the earthen floor. In the distance rose and fell the monotonous howl of the native dogs, interrupted now and then by the impatient whinnying of two skin-and-bone horses who were feeding a few yards away from the hut.

The sick man turned uneasily, and opened his eyes. He was lying on a comfortless bed enough—as beds are apt to be in the bush—roughly improvised with brushwood and horse-blankets. His companion bent over him and took his hand.

"Are you feeling better, Cyril, old fellow?" he said, in a voice as tender as any woman's could have been.

The other shook his head.

"I shall never be better," he answered, his voice hoarse with fever and exhaustion. "I am dying. You know it; and so do I."

His comrade was silent ; and his features contracted sharply. Yes—he knew it, and the knowledge cut hard. For the dying man had cheerfully and unweariedly nursed him through a long weary spell of the same lingering sickness that was now sapping his own life away. They had been companions, too, in many a rough adventure during the last six months. They had more than once faced death together ; and they had become friends as only men can be friends.

Presently Cyril spoke again, his shadowy fingers closing feebly but affectionately over the other's hand.

"Conrath," he said, speaking slowly and with long pauses between the words—"there is something—I want to say to you. I know, of course, that you—have always cared for—little Bee."

The other's grey face grew greyer ; but he did not speak nor stir.

"Old fellow—are you listening ?"

"Yes," said Conrath briefly.

"I have sometimes wondered—if you knew"—went on the hoarse wavering voice—"that she—cared for you."

There was a pause ; then Conrath, leaning his elbow on his knee, and covering his face with his hand, answered heavily,

"I once fancied—if I had allowed myself to think so——"
He broke off suddenly.

"There is no use in raking up these things now," he added after a short silence. "Try to sleep a little, there's a good old chap—and drink this."

"No," with a difficult smile. "I shall sleep—soon enough. Let me finish. She—always cared for you. I have reason to—know it. Let her be happy. Marry her—when you get home to England. And tell her—tell her—I was always faithful to her. Give her—my love."

"I have done with marrying and giving in marriage," was the dreary and somewhat bitter answer. "Besides, I don't even know where she is. It is nearly three years since I went to the little old cottage, and found it shut up and deserted. Mrs. Chandleur was dead ; and Bee had gone—I don't know where. If she had cared—ever so little—she would surely have let me have one word. For all I know she may be married—or dead." And his deep voice shook.

"No—she is not married," said the other in a singularly quiet

tone. "I know her, I think, better than you do. And she is not dead—or I should have—known."

Both were silent for a brief space. It was the first time Bee's name had been mentioned between them since that night in Fay Conrath's drawing-room, long ago. At last Conrath spoke again.

"I wish to God"—he said with white lips—"that I were lying there instead of you. You have given your life for me—while I——"

Cyril pressed his hand feebly.

"That is all nonsense, old man," he said, with the ghost of his old kindly smile. "I did no more for you—than you are doing for me now." Then in a quick changed voice—"Conrath—I feel awfully faint and queer. Lift me up. Don't forget to—tell her——"

They were his last words. When Conrath laid him down again he was dead.

The solitary man sat all night beside that still, silent shape that had been his friend—one hand still grasping the slowly-stiffening fingers, the other pressed hard over his aching eyes.

The moon paled and died. The swift Australian dawn flooded the sky with passionate rose-colour. A light wind ran through the chinks of the log-hut, and ruffled the dead man's hair. And over Conrath's heart tore a wild, sick mighty longing—stronger than grief, or regret, or love for woman—the indescribable, not-to-be-reasoned-with longing of body and soul for *home*.

* * * * *

Meanwhile Bee, far away in England, was doing her best to struggle bravely with "the duty that lay nearest," and that—as some of us may have had occasion to know—is not always such an easy matter as stern moralists would have us believe. She had now been a year at Berstwith Manor, and Sadie, her little pupil, was between four and five years old.

Sadie was a sweet-tempered child—pretty, too, in a peculiar half-weird fashion—and singularly companionable and intelligent for her age. Bee had grown very fond of her—both for her father's sake and for her own. Nevertheless she was not nearly so happy as she had been in Curzon Street. Old Mr. and Mrs. Conrath's treatment of their little niece's governess was very kind—as far as it went. But they never dreamed of admitting her to such terms of intimacy as Mrs. Enderton had done. They never

allowed her to forget that she *was* their niece's governess. They certainly never dreamed of asking her to join them in the drawing-room. Not that Bee cared very much for that doubtful privilege ; but—well, perhaps her life in the Treherne household had spoiled her for the ordinary practicalities of governess-ship.

But the love of little Sadie atoned for much. Intelligent though she was, she had none of the unnatural shrewdness which had characterized her mother's childhood. But outwardly she grew more like the child Fay every day. It was her eyes, I think, that were so marvellously like. And she had the same dark lashes and eyebrows—the same fluffy flaxen hair. There was little of Douglas about her, except, at times, a certain half-stern compression of the little lips—almost comical in such a baby. Like most children who have been brought up by elderly people, she spoke very distinctly, with but few of the quaint abbreviations and lisping common to many little ones.

She often talked, in a rambling baby-fashion, of her father, whom she seemed to regard as little short of a demi-god—though, of course, she could not remember him.

"This is my papa," she said, seizing upon a fligree photograph-frame one day when she and Bee were roaming through the various rooms—Mr. and Mrs. Conrath having gone to pay a round of calls—"my own dear, darling papa. And I am his little girl. He looks quite sorry, you know—because my mamma is dead. Grannie says he is away in far, far, countries ; but when I am a big girl he is coming home, and will never go away any more."

Bee looked long and wistfully at the dear, well-known face—then turned away, her eyes dim with tears.

"Are you going to cry, Miss Somers?" said the little one anxiously. "Your eyes are quite wet. *Don't* cry."

And dropping the frame unceremoniously on the carpet, she climbed into her governess's lap, and dried the wet eyes with her own little handkerchief.

"Did you ever see my papa?" she added, with the curious intuition of childhood.

Bee flushed painfully. Then after a minute she said, pushing the flaxen hair back from Fay's brown questioning eyes,

"Once, long ago—when I was a little girl like you—I knew some one—with a face like your papa."

"Was it a boy?" inquired Sadie with interest.

"It was a boy—yes," Bee answered.

"Is he a grown-up gentleman now?"

"Yes."

"And had he a face *just* like my papa?"

"Not exactly. But very nearly."

"Perhaps he has a little girl the very same as me," observed the child thoughtfully.

"Perhaps," said Bee laying her lips to the soft hair.

"But why does it make you cry to think about him, Miss Somers, dear? Do you never see him now?"

"Oh don't ask so many questions, childie. I am not crying. But—but I am tired."

"My papa can write books," went on Sadie, with an important air. "Grannie told Mrs. Carston yesterday that he was very populous; and I asked her what it meant, and she said it meant that people read his books all over the world."

"Popular, dear,—not populous," corrected Bee somewhat hysterically.

"No—I'm sure grannie said populous," insisted the little one. "Anyway she said I ought to be very proud of my papa—and so I am. Oh, Miss Somers, I wish I could see him now—this very minute!"

Did Bee's heart echo the wish? I think so.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ACROSS THE YEARS!

"A ghost?"

I know that I have heard the laugh of one,

Ah, many a time this morning in the sun;

And seen its very face look down at me,

Above the bird's nest in this apple-tree.

It does not know—how should it know?—how still

A grave lies in the dew below the hill,

Where eyes too like its own can never see

How full of tears the violets there can be."

S. M. B. PIATT.

"She is thine own at last, O faithful soul!

The love that changed not with the changing years

Hath its reward!"

THE orchard at Berstwith Manor was an exquisite retreat

wherein to wile away a summer afternoon. The turf was mossy, soft, velvety—studded here and there with gay little wild flowers. It was quite near to the trimly-kept fruit-garden, too, and when the wind came that way received delicious balmy suggestions of strawberries, raspberries, and luscious wall-fruit. In this orchard Bee and her little pupil spent many a long tranquil hour. They were to be found there on this sultry July afternoon—Bee deep in one of George Meredith's novels (I think it was "*Beauchamp's Career*")—Sadie alternately chasing lazy, downy butterflies, disposing of the ripe fruit that gleamed here and there on the short grass, and indulging in the forbidden but exciting pastime of climbing such trees as the shortness of her legs rendered available.

"Don't eat too much fruit, dear," said Bee dreamily, raising her eyes from her book. "It is not good for you. And above all don't eat these nasty little bits of gum. And oh, Sadie, you have been climbing trees again. Look at your nice clean frock."

The child came and threw herself down at Bee's side.

"Why do grown-up people always keep saying 'Don't'?" she said coaxingly, leaning her flushed little face against the other's lap. Then almost in the same breath she added, "Tell me about that boy who was so like my papa's picture."

Bee laid down her book and stroked the rough hair lovingly.

"What shall I tell you about him, dear?" she said after a minute.

"Oh, I don't know. Tell me if you will ever see him again."

Bee shook her head.

"No—I think not," she answered.

"Why? Is he dead—like my mamma?"

"No, no—" was the answer, almost sharply. "Sadie—you must never say that."

"Why?—dear Miss Somers? Did you love him very much?" whispered the little creature with a loving hug.

"Yes, darling," answered Bee almost inaudibly, clasping the child close up to her heart. "I loved him very, very dearly."

"Did he love you too?"

Bee's lip quivered. She waited a moment before she answered. Then she said,

"I think not, Sadie."

"Will he never love you?"

"No—never."

"He was a horrid boy. I hate him," said the little one vindictively. "Never mind. I'll love you."

And having kissed Bee till she was out of breath, she rushed off to the garden to gather her some strawberries, with the innocent view of comforting her thereby.

Bee sat still. Two heavy tears hung on her dark eyelashes. But she rubbed them away directly, and returned to her book again.

The shadows were lengthening over the fragrant orchard. One could hear the hoarse monotonous croaking of the frogs in the reeds down by the river. A thrush was singing in the green dim shade of the branches overhead.

Presently Bee laid down her book.

"Is he dead—like my mamma?"

The child's words rang in her ears still. Her heart seemed slowly climbing up to her throat to choke her.

Another shadow fell across the grass. A man was crossing the orchard, crushing the gay little flowers ruthlessly beneath his quick firm tread.

Bee sprang to her feet. *Who* was it?

Of course you know who it was. It was Douglas Conrath. Paler, thinner, older-looking. But otherwise the very same old Douglas.

Bee stared at him silently. She could not have uttered one word—just then.

He stopped short when he was within a few yards of her. Every vestige of colour had left his face. He, too, seemed stricken with a dumb devil.

At last, in a strained, husky voice, he spoke.

"Bee!" he said—"my little Bee! Can it be you?"

The blood was beginning to throb back to Bee's heart again. Perhaps, under the circumstances, it was hardly in human nature—woman's human nature—that she should let him see how dearly she loved him—how passionately she had longed for him all these years. Her small face hardened somewhat; and her voice was quite clear and steady as she advanced towards him and held out her hand.

"Are you very much surprised to see me here, Douglas?" she

said. "I am sure you must be. I am governess to your little daughter. Let me welcome you home to England again."

He took her hand in silence. While a wave of inexpressibly bitter pain swept across his heart. Poor Cyril! he had been raving. And he—Douglas Conrath—had been a fool. There was no love in the cold face of this grave, self-possessed little woman—not even the old sister-love of long ago.

"Have you seen your aunt and uncle?" went on Bee, still in that sweet calm voice. "They will be very pleased, and I think very much surprised. I am almost sure they did not expect you."

"I have not seen them," he answered briefly. "They have gone for a drive, I believe. I wired this morning; but it seems the message only arrived some few minutes ago. I was told I should find my little daughter here," he added.

His voice was cold also—cold to indifference.

Bee shaded her eyes from the level rays of the setting sun.

"She is in the garden," she said. "I will go and bring her."

She moved swiftly away across the sun-touched grass.

"Sadie!" she called softly. "Sadie!"

Douglas leaned his back against a strong young apple-tree, and involuntarily closed his eyes. So this was their meeting—after all these years! he thought with a pang of queer, dull pain. Well—he had hoped for nothing else. So he told himself. (Of course you know how much truth there was likely to be in that!)

"She has always cared for you. I know it"—he seemed to hear Cyril say—as his thoughts flew back over the weary miles to a lonely nameless grave under the burning Australian sun. But Cyril had not seen her for more than four years. And in four years any heart may change—especially a woman's heart.

The muffled sound of Bee's returning feet over the grass brought him back to the present again. He started, as he gazed down into the brown baby eyes looking gravely up into his—the eyes of his little daughter.

Good Heavens!—it was the very face of Fay herself. He had not loved her—that dead wife of his. But as he looked into her child's eyes, with their marvellous, almost unearthly likeness, a sudden rushing memory of the old days came back to him—the curious stabbing pain of remorsefully remembered short-

comings and indifference towards a loving heart that is in its grave. He could not speak for a moment. And Bee saw that his lips were trembling.

Sadie slipped her tiny hand into his.

"Are you my papa?" she said, slowly.

He stooped, lifted her in his arms, and kissed her.

"Yes, my darling," he answered in a husky voice. "Are you glad to see me?"

Bee moved away, and left them together. She went slowly up to the house, where she found the old couple just returned from their drive, and in a state of great excitement.

"Miss Somers," exclaimed Mrs. Conrath—"have you seen my nephew? Arkwright tells me he went down to the orchard to seek Sadie."

"Yes—I have seen him," Bee answered in a carefully modulated voice. "I think he is coming up with Sadie now."

On the day following his arrival at Berstwith, Conrath went to visit his wife's grave. By old Evan Conrath's special desire she had been buried in Berstwith churchyard, within a handsome railed space sacred to the remains of the Conraths and their wives. It was with curiously mingled feelings that the young widower read the inscription on the already darkening stone.

Poor little Fay! It seemed only yesterday that her plaintive voice had sounded in his ears—only yesterday that he had felt so bitterly impatient of her jealousy and her fretful complainings. Then came the soothing memory of these tranquil happy days before her death. He thanked God for them. With a long, shivering sigh he bowed his head upon the tall grey stone, and for some minutes remained quite still. And in these minutes he put all his dreary past away from him, and let hope spring up in his heart again.

For he had made up his mind that the love-light should flash once more in Bee's coldly-sweet dark eyes—and for him.

An afternoon or two later he met Bee and Sadie down by the river. The child flew to him, as usual; and, also as usual, Bee turned away. Conrath stooped and whispered a few words in Sadie's ear, and with a merry little nod she ran off in the direction of the fruit-garden.

Her father threw away the cigar he had been smoking, and in a few strides overtook Bee, who was walking as if for a wager.

"Why do you avoid me as you have done during the past few days, Bee?" he said quietly.

"Avoid you? I don't know why. I don't avoid you. Do I?" she answered in somewhat incoherent fashion.

"You know very well that you do. I have not had one word alone with you since the day I came. Why is it, Bee? You used not to be so changeable."

"Changeable?" flashed out the girl. "It is not I who am changeable. How can you accuse me of it? You—who for all those years never took the trouble to find out whether I were living or dead!"

"You wrong me, Bee," he said, still in that quiet voice. "Sit down here, and let me explain to you."

"No—I must look after Sadie," she said nervously. "And I wish you would not call me Bee. The old Bee is dead," she added with a hysterical laugh—"or is merged, rather, in a person called Katherine Somers."

"Sadie will do very well without you for a while," was the calm answer. "And as for your changing your name—did you never think how effectually that barred my discovering your whereabouts? When I came home three years ago my first thought was of you. But you were gone—the little cottage was shut up——"

"Ah! you did go there, then? You did think of me?" she interrupted him in a quick excited way.

"Yes," was the brief answer.

"Then—I have misjudged you," she said slowly.

He did not answer just immediately. When he did, his voice was almost stern.

"Yes—you have misjudged me in more ways than one," he said. "Why did you not write to tell me of Mrs. Chandleur's death? Why did you not let me obviate the necessity of your earning your living in this way? Who had so good a right to take care of you as I?"

"It is not a very arduous way of earning my living," she said, looking away from him across the deep cool river, and speaking almost inaudibly. "It is not much of a task to take care of Fay's little child—and yours."

"But you have only been here for a year," he said impatiently. "Before that, what kind of people were you with? And before that? Good God! what I have suffered in thinking of you—you

small, delicate thing!—cast adrift in London—liable to want, and sickness, perhaps insult. You have been cruel to me, Bee, more than cruel."

"I did not know—you cared," she faltered.

"You did not know I cared!" He had risen to his feet, and was looking down at her with a curiously sad expression in his dark eyes. "Did you think the memory of the old days had quite left me, then?"

"Yes—that is what I thought."

There was a moment's silence; then Conrath said abruptly, "Bee—I have a message for you; a message from some one who loved you very dearly, and who is—dead."

She looked up, startled. Then she sprang to her feet.

"Ah, not Cyril!" she cried sharply—"not Cyril! Say it is not Cyril!"

"Yes"—he answered in a very gentle voice—"it is Cyril."

Bee burst into a passion of subdued but bitter sobbing. In vain Conrath tried to soothe her. She seemed hardly conscious of his presence—hardly heard him when he gave her poor Cyril's dying message, told her of their friendship, their many months' companionship.

"It is my fault," she sobbed. "I sent him away. If it had not been for me he would be alive now."

But Douglas caught her suddenly in his arms.

"Hush!" he said roughly. "Don't grieve for him like that—or I shall think—I shall think—that you have a deeper reason for regretting him than mere remorse. Child—for God's sake stop crying. Do you hear me, Bee. Do you want to drive me mad?"

She could feel his heart beating fiercely against her cheek. His breath came in deep labouring gasps—like sobs.

"Bee"—he whispered hoarsely—"will you marry me?"

But she tried to free herself from the strong masterful arms.

"Don't!" she cried wildly—"don't speak to me of marriage. I shall never marry any one—never—*never!*"

He loosened his arms from about her.

"Are you in earnest?" he said in a strange still voice—

"Papa—papa—are you making my Miss Somers cry?" exclaimed Sadie's vibrating treble. "Miss Somers—don't cry. See—I have been gathering strawberries for papa, and you shall have some."

But Bee had rushed away ; and Conrath in a stern peremptory voice forbade Sadie to follow her.

"Come here, Sadie," he said. "Miss Somers doesn't want you just now."

He sat down on a rustic bench as he spoke, and his little daughter, carefully laying down a cabbage-leaf full of strawberries, climbed upon his knee.

"Have you got a headache, papa ?"

"No, Sadie," he answered wearily.

"Then why have you these little lines on your brow ? Miss Somers always has them when she has a headache. Or," she added, "when she is thinking about that boy."

"What boy ?" her father asked with a quick frown.

"A boy with the very same kind of face as you," was the grave answer. "She used to know him when she was a little girl, and she loved him—oh, ever so much."

"And do you think she loves him now, Sadie ?" he said, pressing his lips to her forehead.

"I *think* so," answered the child reflectively. "I asked her one day, but she didn't tell me."

"What did she say ?"

"She said, 'Don't ask so many questions, dear.'"

Her father sat for some time in silence, pulling at his moustache, and gazing at the swiftly-flowing river.

Now, Sadie was a very sweet little girl, but like some other little girls—and big ones too—she had rather a long tongue. And that very same afternoon, an hour or so later, when she was trotting round the garden with "Grannie," she observed innocently :

"To-day my papa made my Miss Somers cry."

"What do you say, child ?" was the somewhat sharp answer.

"To-day my papa made my Miss Somers cry," repeated the little one, serenely unconscious of the mischief she was doing. "And she would not stop crying, though papa put his arms round her and told her not to. And I think he kissed her—but I am not quite sure."

Meanwhile Bee, in the seclusion of her room, was trying to remove the traces of tears from her face and eyes by means of eau-de-Cologne and water. The news of Cyril's death had been a great shock to her. Somehow she could not associate the idea of death with *debonnair*, easy-going Cyril. How kind he had

always been to her! how gentle, how considerate—a friend indeed. Her eyes filled with tears again. But underlying her grief for the man who had loved her so well there leapt and danced the knowledge that the man she loved had asked her to be his wife. True—she had refused him. But he would understand. Douglas always understood things. He would know that smarting under the shock of the noble fellow's death who had once been her accepted lover, she could not, just then, think of her own happiness.

A sharp knock at the door.

"Come in," said Bee faintly.

Mrs. Conrath entered, looking pale, and exceedingly stern.

"I have a few words to say to you, Miss Somers," she said in a cold voice. "I have heard something which has grieved and surprised me very much."

"Yes?" answered Bee, with a look half haughty, half bewildered.

"Is it the case that this afternoon you were seen down by the river sobbing and crying in my nephew's arms, and that he—that he *kissed* you?"

The angry blood rushed to the girl's face—then flew back to her heart. But she did not speak.

"From your silence," went on the old lady in an icy, contemptuous tone, "I conclude it *is* true. Such shameless conduct—with an utter stranger—surely requires no comment."

"Mr. Conrath is not a stranger to me. I knew him years ago," was the low, choked answer.

"Indeed! Are you engaged to him, may I ask?"

"No—I am not engaged to him."

"Ah! I am afraid, Miss Somers, your propensities are not to be overcome. You will understand what I mean when I tell you that it has lately come to my knowledge why you were obliged to leave Mr. Treherne's employment. You will pardon me if I say that a young person with your singular ideas as to propriety is hardly fitted to be intrusted with the care of young children."

Bee had grown deadly white.

"You need say no more, Mrs. Conrath," she said steadily. "I beg to resign my situation. I shall leave your house immediately. Though I am only a governess, I will not submit to be insulted. How dare you say such things to me?"

"You are forgetting yourself, I think," said the old lady stiffly. "By to-morrow perhaps you may be in a different frame of mind." So saying she went out of the room.

Bee remained standing by the dressing-table in a dumb, breathless passion of half-incredulous fury. She would leave Berstwith Manor now—this very night—she resolved with a curious panting little sob. She would not even wait to see Douglas.

"If he loves me he can come for me," she muttered between her teeth, as she tore her gowns from their pegs and crammed them into her trunk. "But I will never, never enter that wicked old woman's doors again. How dared she! Oh—how *dared* she!"

She looked a very vicious little woman indeed as she flew about the room, swiftly collecting her belongings. A strange singing was in her head; she was trembling from head to foot.

When all was finished she felt so weak and strange that a horrible fear of fainting came over her. So she straightway stuck a pin into her arm until the blood came, and the tears sprang to her eyes. Then she rang the bell, and by the judicious gift of half-a-sovereign to Jane—the most amiable of the housemaids—pledged that damsel to silence, and arranged that her trunk should be sent to the station in time for the 8.50 train for Llewelly. For her projected line of action was as follows. When Sadie had gone to bed, and while the family were at dinner, she would simply take her hand-bag, walk to the station, and catch the train to Llewelly. She would stay there all night, and go on to London the following morning. All this was fearfully headstrong, and stupid, and uncalled for, of course; and I cannot help feeling a little ashamed of my hot-tempered heroine as I write it. But I suppose we have all been more or less headstrong and stupid in our day.

Her passion cooled somewhat as she sat at tea for the last time in the quiet sunny schoolroom, beside the small firebrand who had unconsciously done all this mischief. Perhaps a tiny hope crept into her heart that she might see Douglas before she left—that perhaps he might come to seek her—would tell Mrs. Conrath how she had misjudged her. But she would not admit this hope, even to herself.

The dressing-gong rang, however, and then the dinner-gong, and Douglas did not come. So Bee hardened her heart.

As Douglas and his uncle were sitting over their fruit and wine after Mrs. Conrath had left them, the former, who sat facing a window looking out upon the avenue, saw a small slender figure stealing down the winding gravelled sweep, keeping close to the trees. Recognizing the figure, he rose and somewhat curtly announced his intention of taking a stroll. In the hall he lit a cigar, drew a light overcoat over his evening dress, and walked down the avenue smartly enough to catch sight of Bee again as he turned the second corner. Then he saw that she was carrying a bag. Where on earth was she going at this time of night? he wondered. Then—all at once—the truth flashed upon him.

As a matter of fact he was in a suppressed passion. Just before dinner his aunt had somewhat nervously hinted to him what Sadie had told her.

"Well?" Douglas had answered sternly, mentally resolving to interview Miss Sadie later.

"Well, my dear Douglas—surely——" began the old lady in a deprecating way.

"You did not, I hope, say anything to—to Miss Somers?" said her nephew in a curiously repressed voice.

"Certainly I did, Douglas," was the dignified answer. "You cannot suppose that——"

"And did she tell you that I had asked her to marry me—and that she had refused?" interrupted Douglas, still in that queer voice.

"*What!*" almost screamed his aunt, doubting the evidence of her own ears.

"I knew Miss Somers—though that is not her real name—many years ago," went on Douglas, who had become very pale, "when she had as little anticipation of earning her own living as you have now. Her name is Bee Adeane, and her grandfather was at one time one of the richest men in London. I did not tell you all this, because I understood and respected her motive for repressing it. Nor did I see any necessity of informing you of our previous acquaintance. I was both intensely surprised and passionately thankful to find her here. I have cared for her for many years, and—as I have told you—this afternoon I asked her to marry me. And," he added slowly, "I intend to ask her to-night—to reconsider her decision."

"Douglas! you will never be so *mad!*" exclaimed his aunt

almost in tears. "If you only knew! The very last situation she was in, she——"

But Douglas silenced her with a haughty gesture of his hand.

Just then old Evan Conrath entered the room, and the gong sounded for dinner—during which meal Douglas hardly spoke one word.

So he was in a strangely excited frame of mind as he swiftly followed the steps of the girl who was doing her best to run away from him. He followed her to the station, saw her enter the little ticket-office, and then the waiting-room. As she turned he caught sight of her face, and from what he saw there rightly judged that the present was no propitious time to renew his offer of marriage. So he, too, entered the ticket-office, and took a ticket for Llewellyn, which little village, though only a few miles away, was as far as travellers could book from Berstwith. The train, he found, was not due for five minutes yet, so he scribbled a little note in pencil to Mrs. Conrath, saying he had gone to London on some business which he would explain later, and requesting that his servant and portmanteau might follow him by the first train in the morning. He would stay at the Langham, he added. He gave the note and a shilling to a porter, with the injunction that it was to be delivered at once.

Just as he had done so the train came in. Bee got into a carriage near the engine. Douglas got into one further back. He was feeling very much annoyed, partly with his aunt, and partly, much as he loved her, with Bee herself. He knew perfectly well, of course, what a talk would be caused in the neighbourhood by their both rushing off by the night train in this fashion. But he felt he simply could *not* run the risk of losing sight of her again. For he had a pretty good guess that she would go straight to London—and once plunged into that clueless labyrinth, she might elude him endlessly. Nevertheless he was conscious of having undertaken something of the nature of a wild-goose chase. She might persist in her refusal to marry him—nay, in her present mood she might even refuse to speak to him. And she would be alone, and friendless, and poor, in wide busy London. And he—he had no manner of right over her. The strong man's heart beat up to his throat like a nervous girl's.

It was nearly dark when they reached Llewellyn, and there-

fore he had some difficulty in keeping Bee in sight. She took the omnibus for the "Star Hotel," and her pursuer, unseen by her, swung himself on to the top of the same vehicle. Arrived at the quiet little hotel he saw her descend, and heard her inquire when the first train for London started next morning. Being told that it was due at 6.30, she disappeared within the hotel. Douglas, too, descended, and made his way to a smaller inn somewhat further down the street. Having ordered his breakfast in time for the first train, he partook of a brandy and soda, and retired to his room. Not to sleep, though. Sleep was far from him. He did not even go to bed, but spent the whole of the brief summer night in pacing his room monotonously and regularly from end to end, much to the discomfort and exasperation of an old gentleman who occupied the room below.

On the following morning as he sat at breakfast he had the satisfaction of seeing Bee step into the omnibus and be driven off to the station. He followed in a fly, and caught the train just as it was starting.

It was long past noon when they arrived at Paddington. Bee left her trunk at the left-luggage office. She was looking very pale and subdued this morning. There was a pathetically forlorn look about her sweet little face, too. At least Douglas fancied so. It was no longer the face of the vixen of yesterday.

As she turned to walk down the platform she came face to face with Douglas. Who raised his hat and said calmly:

"Good morning, Bee."

She started violently, and turned so white that he hastily drew her hand within his arm.

"Where are you going, Bee?" he said very gently.

"I—I don't know," she whispered.

She felt giddy, and sick, and strange. And he had startled her.

"Have you had any breakfast?" he inquired, surveying her keenly the while.

She shook her head.

"I thought not. You look as if you were going to faint. What a foolish child you are," he said very tenderly.

Then as she did not speak, he went on:

"Now listen to me, Bee. I am not going to ask you what is

the meaning of this mad escapade of yours. From something my aunt said to me just before dinner last night, I think I can guess. What I want you to understand is that I have got you, and that I shall never let you go again, in this world or the next. If you do not love me now—I shall make you love me. Give me the right to take care of you, Bee!"

She shivered, but said nothing.

Whereupon Douglas called a hansom, and directed the man to drive to Verrey's, in Regent Street.

Now, no course of conduct which he could have adopted could have served his purpose so well as this masterful taking possession of her. She felt weak and helpless in his hands. She knew she had done a terribly foolish thing. Besides—she loved him so dearly.

When they had finished luncheon Douglas said,

"I am going to take you to a motherly old Scotchwoman with whom I used to lodge long ago. Her name is Mrs. Warren. She has a nice quiet house not far from Putney, and I know she will be kind to you."

Bee said nothing. She was still feeling dazed and bewildered. She hardly even knew if she were happy or not. She was so desperately tired—so nervous and unstrung. If she only might lay her head down somewhere and cry! Douglas had spoken very little during the meal. Was he angry with her? she wondered.

So they took the train to Putney, and by attention to the guard's pecuniary weaknesses, Conrath secured a carriage quite to themselves.

The train moved off. And then—and then Douglas, without saying by your leave, or with your leave, just gathered Bee up in his arms, and silently kissed her trembling mouth again and again.

"Be still!" he whispered unsteadily, as she struggled a little. "Do you know how long I have loved you, I wonder? Do you know how I have hungered and sickened for the touch of your lips, my darling—all those years! Say you love me, Bee! Say you will be my wife. Oh, my love!—for God's sake don't let anything stand between us now!"

And Bee? Where was all her pride?—her haughty self-dependence? If I tell you that she just put her arms round

Douglas's neck, and childishly hid her face on his breast—shall you quite despise her?

"Oh Douglas, Douglas"—she sobbed—"take care of me—take care of me!"

Of course there were long explanations after that—which do not concern us in the least. And of course they could hardly believe it when they got to their destination.

"And now, my darling," said Douglas, when they were driving away in a cab to Mrs. Warren's cottage—"how much of your spinsterhood do you suppose you have left to you?"

"I—I don't quite understand?" she made answer, lifting her eyes to his with the old questioning look he remembered so well.

"Shall I explain to you?" he said, bending his head to kiss her. "Within the next four or five days, my little Bee, you will be Mrs. Douglas Conrath; and I shall no longer have any superstitious fear of losing you—as I have now."

"Oh Douglas!" was the shocked answer. "So soon? I couldn't."

And her eyes fell shamefacedly.

"Yes, you could," he whispered—"to please me, my darling."

Bee blushed, and was silent. After all, she had promised to be his wife. Did it matter when?—sooner or later?

And just then the cab stopped at Mrs. Warren's cottage. Having comfortably established Bee under the care of the worthy old Scotchwoman—who remembered him quite well, and was overjoyed to see him—Douglas drove off to town again, and repaired to Doctors' Commons to see about a special license. Then he drove to his hotel and changed his clothes. For evening dress, worn all night and half the following day, is apt to become monotonous, especially when it necessitates a buttoned-up overcoat in the month of July. As he left his room a waiter met him with the information that Mr. Evan Conrath was waiting to see him in a private sitting-room. A monosyllabic expression escaped Conrath's lips as he received this piece of news.

He found the old gentleman pacing up and down near one of the windows in great excitement.

"My dear boy," he said quickly, as the young man greeted him—"what the devil does this mean? You must allow, you know, that it has a queer look—a very queer look."

He spoke half-nervously—for to tell the truth, he stood a little in awe of his literary nephew.

"I hardly understand you, uncle," replied Douglas with a slightly haughty inflection in his pleasant voice. "What do *you* mean?"

No one likes to explain, at a moment's notice, exactly what he or she may mean. It is too much, perhaps, to ask of human nature. Because, nine times out of ten, people don't know what they mean—especially when they are as excited as old Evan Conrath was just now.

"What do I mean?" he repeated. "Well—my dear Douglas, you know perfectly that, as your aunt very properly says, it does *not* look well for a young man to go tearing after a young woman straight from the dinner-table up to London, at nine o'clock at night, without even waiting to change his clothes; and to be seen—as you *were* seen, as you *were* seen, sir—holding her in his arms down by the river, as if she was his promised wife, by Jove!"

"And if I tell you that the young lady in question *is* my promised wife? What then?" said Douglas quietly.

"Eh? *What?*" exclaimed the old gentleman, sitting down suddenly. "Oh nonsense, you know. You're—you're joking."

"I can assure you I am in no joking humour, Uncle Evan. The young lady whom you engaged as Sadie's governess under the name of Miss Somers, is Bee Adeane, of whom I think you have heard me speak. As a little child she shared my mother's home and mine. As a woman, she won all the heart I ever had to give. I hope to call her my wife before a week has passed," he added, with a strange softening of voice and eyes.

"Good Heavens! Then—what made you marry the other one?" exclaimed his uncle.

Douglas's face became indescribably expressionless. But he did not speak.

Evan Conrath rose, and stamped about in great perturbation.

"What your aunt will say I'm sure I don't know," he said testily, at last. "I know she had a most suitable wife in her eye for you. And with your talent, too—to throw yourself away upon a governess. Not even a beauty, by Jove! And I'm sure your first wife wasn't much to look at either. It's my impression that

the cleverer a man is the more he makes a mess of his love affairs."

"But you'll give the bride away, uncle, won't you?" said his nephew, with the faintest suspicion of a smile under his moustache.

"No, I won't, sir! No, I won't!" was the indignant answer. "You may make a fool of yourself if you like—but you won't get me to assist you."

"Very well," was the calm answer. "I shall bid you good-bye then, as I have an engagement. I suppose we shall see but little of each other for the future?"

"And why the devil should you suppose so? Eh?" burst out his uncle, facing round upon him.

And Douglas answered coldly,

"As you seem to have made up your mind not to receive my wife, I'm afraid you must exclude me from your visiting-list as well."

Then old Evan Conrath suddenly gave in.

"Look here, Douglas," he said huskily. "In Heaven's name don't let us have the old story over again. I will give the bride away—if you wish it. After all, happiness is the great thing. And I suppose you are fond of the girl, or you wouldn't be such a fool as to marry her. God bless you, my boy. I only hope you won't regret it, that's all—though I'm pretty sure you will. And, as I said before—what you aunt will say, I don't know."

Douglas smiled. It was a matter of indifference to him what his aunt said—or what anybody else said for that matter.

He jumped into a hansom—after promising to dine with his uncle later—and drove off Putney-wards to a blissful half-hour with Bee. What a lot they had to say to each other, to be sure!

So the days and hours flew. And almost before Bee had time to realize that she was engaged, she was married.

It was a very quiet affair, and little Sadie was the only bridesmaid. Evan Conrath not only gave away the bride, but persuaded his wife to be present likewise. The only other guest was Ralph Debenham.

And did they go off to the Continent or to some borrowed country-seat for their honeymoon? Not a bit of it. They went straight to Douglas's old house in Kensington, which had been

let until a few months ago, and, as it happened, was in capital order.

"Really, the lad seems very happy, you know. Eh, my dear," observed Evan Conrath to his spouse, late on the evening of the wedding-day.

"He has thrown himself away, Evan—simply thrown himself away," that lady answered in a vexed voice. "And—mark my words—he will regret it."

* * * * *

Nevertheless, if you had looked into Douglas Conrath's study one July evening, nearly three years after his second marriage, I think you would have been pretty sure he had not regretted it.

It was a luxurious home-like room, with the unmistakable traces of a woman's constant presence about it. Douglas himself was leaning back in a huge easy-chair, tired and languid with months of hard writing. It was finished now, and he might rest. Besides the look of bodily or rather mental fatigue upon his face, there was another look that you have never seen there before—a look of deepest happiness and content. He looked younger, Bee sometimes told him, than he had done ten years ago.

And Bee—such a bonnie, winsome Bee—was sitting on a low stool at his side, leaning her head against his knee. One of her hands was clasping his; the other held a few sheets of manuscript which she had just finished reading. Her eyes were looking dreamily through the open window to the garden, where Sadie—now a slim little maid of nearly eight years old—was running round the trees in a mad game of hide-and-seek with a dainty tortoise-shell kitten. The setting summer sun was shining on the waving trees, turning their green to gold, and lighting up the child's face and hair with an almost unearthly radiance. The sleepy birds were crooning a good-night song.

Sadie reigned alone in the nursery of the sunny old house. If there was the tiniest shadow on Bee's heart, I think it was that she had no child of her own. Sadie was very, very dear to her. But—it was not the same.

If it was a shadow to Douglas too, he never implied it by either word or look. His wife was everything to him; his companion, his helper, his inspiration, and—as he often told her—his good angel. Just now, as his eyes rested upon her earnest little

face, there was a passion of love in their dark depths that is not altogether common to husbands whose vows have seen three summers and winters.

Presently Sadie ran in, holding the captured kitten in her arms.

"I am going to put kitty to bed," she said. Then suddenly making a dart at Bee, she added caressingly, as she kissed her, "Dear darling little mamma—you look so pretty!"

"What a sweet loving wee thing she is," murmured Bee, as the door closed behind her little step-daughter. "I believe she is just as fond of me as if I had been her own mother."

There was the veriest breath of a sigh in her words. Her husband understood it. Leaning forward suddenly, he took her in his arms, and gently kissed her lips. And she clung to him with a smothered sob.

They sat silent for a long time after that—his arms still round her, her head resting on his heart. The sun had set; the birds were silent; a pale shadowy moon was already climbing the grey softness of the skies. A tiny breeze had risen, and was stealing across the garden, flooding the room with the faint subtle odour of mignonette. The roar of London sounded far away.

At last Douglas stirred slightly, and clasped his wife closer in his arms.

"My darling wife," he whispered passionately—"my good angel—my better self. God make me worthy of your love and you!"

THE END.

LONDON SOCIETY.

CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

1891.

The Tale of a Gown.

By ALBANY DE FONBLANQUE.

CHAPTER I.

A GREAT LOSS TO SOCIETY.

EARLY in the month of May, not many years ago, the great world read in one of its favourite weeklies the following paragraph :

"Society has to deplore the sudden break up of a very hospitable and apparently happy establishment situate not a thousand miles from Curzon Street. The lady will go back to her mother, and her lord, having resigned his seat in Parliament, will travel for an indefinite period."

Society desiring, as Artemus Ward would have said, to "deplore some more," eagerly set to work inquiring who was the lady, and who her lord. Also to be interested about the *other* lady or the *other* lord as the case might be. For in our days these things are generally double-barrelled. When an explosion takes place, say, in Mayfair, we pick up our ears to listen for the other shot which is to unroof some one, say, in South Kensington. Society, judging that Mr. Lawrence Laidlaw, M.P. for Kilenden, had applied for the stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds, and that the house he had occupied not a thousand miles from Curzon Street was advertised to be let furnished for the rest of the season, was able to localize the firing of the right-hand barrel, but listened in vain for the report of the left. Lawrence Laidlaw had the reputation of being a proud, precise and self-sufficient man—one of those people who go about as a sort of superior schoolmaster, and treat the rest of the world as though they are young gentlemen confided to their charge. He was not popular, but, honestly judged, he was about the last man

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who would be likely to place himself on the wrong side of a *V.* in the Divorce Court.

Against Lily Laidlaw, who had gone back to her mother, no one could say a word until the explosion took place. Then society shook its head sadly and declared that these shy, demure little women can never be depended upon; and, besides, she came of a bad stock. Well, it is true she once had a very disreputable father, but his badness consisted of betting more money than he could pay; dabbling in bill transactions that would not bear investigation, and other specially masculine vices that could hardly be inherited by a daughter whom he had left when she was eleven years old under the care of a loving and irreproachable mother. No, Lily Laidlaw had not been betting or gambling. She had a horror of both. Was it any other form of extravagance? Lily Laidlaw's attire—in which I include everything she wore, from her parasol to her boots—was the envy of her own sex and the admiration of mankind. It was not only that the things fitted and hung well, but they were made of materials which other women could not get, or were only able to find after great trouble and when she had trumped them with something newer and more difficult to obtain. For example, she composed a symphony based on the plumage of a pheasant she saw one day at the Zoo, picked up the satin and things (I write as a man) somewhere, and the result was superlative. But Laidlaw encouraged this taste. He liked his wife to teach women and stand out from the crowd; just as he liked to teach men and occupy a pedestal of his own. Besides, he was too well off in worldly pelf for any extravagance of this sort to hurt him.

Laidlaw was inclined to be jealous. He loved his wife dearly in an undemonstrative way, and it was only in her presence that his hard face softened. And she loved him. If it pleased him for her to turn the cold shoulder to some man whose attentions to a young and pretty matron might be talked about, why, round it went. What did she care? There were plenty of agreeable men about who did not attempt to make love to her. She even broke with her old playmate, Willie Randolph, on this account, but very tenderly, begging him for her sake and for *auld lang syne* to help her please her gloomy lord. At this time Captain Randolph was in the Guards; had nine thousand a year, and was the handsomest man in London. Before he was one-

and-twenty some woman had declared that he was "horribly fascinating," and that made him a fashionable danger. He played candle to all the moths in town for several seasons, and with the experience thus gained did much mischief.

Well, it couldn't be Willie Randolph, because, long before this May morning he had left the army and gone no one knew where. If the great world sees nothing of a man for a year he may just as well be dead, however "fascinating" he may have been.

Puzzle its best, society could not discover the usual cause for a break up, either masculine to suit one case, or feminine to account for the other. It could imagine no reason why a man like Laidlaw, who looked upon the House of Commons as a sort of Olympus, of which he might one day be the Jove, should abandon his seat and fly the country; or why a woman like Lily, who had hitherto managed him so well, and was so fond of her handsome house and her pretty things, should go back to comparative poverty in the Isle of Man. And yet the hour had come when this husband had overwhelmed his wife and her unborn child with associations such as no innocent woman could bear, and when this wife, hitherto so gentle, so ready with the soft answer, faced this husband like a beautiful leopardess at bay, and speaking hardly above her breath, but with an intensity of passion which staggered him, swore that he should never see her face again, or ever look upon that of their child, if God spared it, until he had prayed to it on his knees for its mother's pardon.

Only one little straw could be found to show from which direction this matrimonial storm had come. Shortly before Laidlaw's departure, his mother, with that fear which all women have for law, asked him with bated breath if there would be a divorce. His answer was an emphatic "No." Go into court to amuse the scandalmongers and record his own disgrace? Never! What had he to gain by a divorce? He had tried matrimony under the most favourable circumstances. She (he had left off calling her by her name, or speaking of her as his wife) was a country girl, well and carefully brought up; if she were false, who could be trusted? "No," he concluded, "I will never marry again, and"—between his clenched teeth—"she *shall* not."

This suited old Mrs. Laidlaw down to the ground.

The decision thus pronounced leaked out as such things will.

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I*

Society (male) said that Laidlaw could always be depended upon for behaving himself like an ass. Society (female) threw itself back in its chair and declared with a satisfied smile, it had always been beyond a doubt that Lily had thrown herself away—poor thing!

When society calls a pretty woman under a cloud "poor thing!" you know what follows. It is like the turning down of the thumbs when the bleeding wretch in the sand had not made his victor pay dearly enough for his life.

Laidlaw's last written words to his wife were, "You will hear from my lawyers as to the provision which will be made for you;" and hers to him were, "I will tear up that letter and leave you to your conscience."

CHAPTER II.

ONE SIDE OF IT.

So much for the talk. One side of the facts is this. About ten days before that paragraph appeared in the newspaper Laidlaw was away electioneering. Lily was a power at Kilenden, and dearly loved canvassing; in fact, her pretty face and winning ways had gained for her husband more votes than all his elaborately prepared speeches. But this time she begged off. She was not feeling up to it, she pleaded; besides the seat was quite safe. There was a hesitation and confusion in her manner of saying this which afterwards were counted against her. He said that he should be absent for at least a week, but the night of the very day after that on which he had left London found him making—full of trouble—for what was once his home.

He had received the following letter from his mother.

"Tuesday, 27th.

"Dearest,

"At the risk of being misjudged as usual, I consider it my duty to tell you that Captain Randolph received a visit at his chambers from your wife this day at one o'clock. Of course, I could not telegraph on such a subject; I am told that this will reach you by post in time for you to return to-night and judge for yourself.

"Your affectionate mother,

"C. L."

It did reach him just in time. The clocks were striking midnight when his train came in. He had made up his mind what to do on his way. He would go straight home, show that letter to his wife, hear her reply and act on it. If this were only another of his mother's mare's nests, or half truths which needed but a little scraping to expose a hideous lie,—then he would never speak to her again; were she ten times his mother he would leave her, and cleave to the wife she hated and tried to wrong. But if it were true? In the fierce light of his anger he could see no excuse, find no palliation. He had forbidden this man his house, had ordered his wife never to dance with him, or walk in his company, or sit by his side. He thought he had yielded a great deal in not insisting upon a complete cut. He made this concession on her solemn vow that his jealousy was groundless, and her promise that she would avoid its object as much as their old acquaintance and the exigencies of the society in which they moved would permit.

And yet she had called upon him at his chambers as soon as her husband's back was turned.

He reached the terminus where they had often met and parted. A little later and he was rolling through the well-known London streets which led to his house, and in a few minutes it would be in sight. Suddenly it flashed upon him that he had wasted his time upon ends, and was not in the least prepared with a beginning. The theatres were just out, and the glare and rush along Piccadilly first confused and then almost maddened him. He stopped his cab at the corner of St. James' Street and walked on to gain time, to be able to think, to see if the cool night air would not take the throbbing out of his head. Instinctively he took the nearest way. Had he reflected for a moment he would perhaps have gone round by another street; as it was he found himself opposite the house in which Captain Randolph had his chambers, and then he fell under a sort of fascination and stood trembling before it as though it were some monster that could and would devour him.

The first-floor windows were ablaze with light; the hall was light; all the rest of the house and its neighbours on either side were in utter darkness; a hansom stood at the door.

Could she be there still?

The horror of this thought was yet shivering through him

when the hall door was opened slowly and a woman came out alone. She held the door open for a few inches, said something into the passage and then shut it behind her. Next she took a step towards the cab, but stopped suddenly, made as though she was about to tap at the glass at the side of the door, but changed her mind, stooped (as Laidlaw supposed) to gather up her skirts, and then made a dash for the hansom, which left at a gallop.

The figure was that of his wife, the dress was one of those famous ones he had often seen her wear, but the face was thickly veiled.

Why did he not dash forward and make sure? He asked himself this question with a fierce imprecation when it was too late: many times afterwards he was asked the same thing—why had he not stopped or followed the cab? and was only able to answer, "I could not."

Half the windows became dull. The door opened again and forth came a man in a Scotch cap whistling a popular tune. By this time Laidlaw had recovered his senses. He sprang across the street and caught him by the arm.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

"If you come to that, who are you?" asked the other, throwing off his grasp and assuming a position of defence. "Here, po——"

"Hush! don't make a fool of yourself, do I look like a thief?"

"I don't care a —— what you *look* like: you act like as if you meant no good, rushing at a man in the street at this time of night, and grabbing him!"

"Well, well! perhaps I was too sudden. I assure you that you are perfectly safe. I only wanted to ask you a few questions. Do you live in that house?"

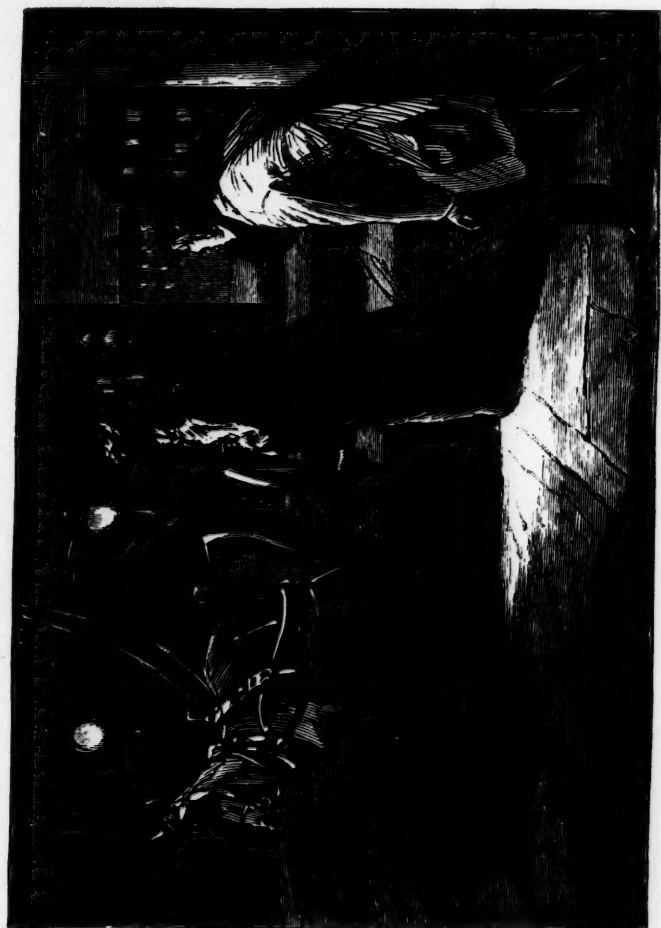
"Well, I do, and I don't."

"Are you Captain Randolph's servant?"

"Yes, I am."

"Go back and tell him I must see him to-night. Tell him I *will*; do you hear? Stay"—he took out his purse, selected two coins from one pocket and a card from another—"here are a couple of sovereigns for the fright I gave you just now; that's my card; take it to your master, and say I will see him to-night."

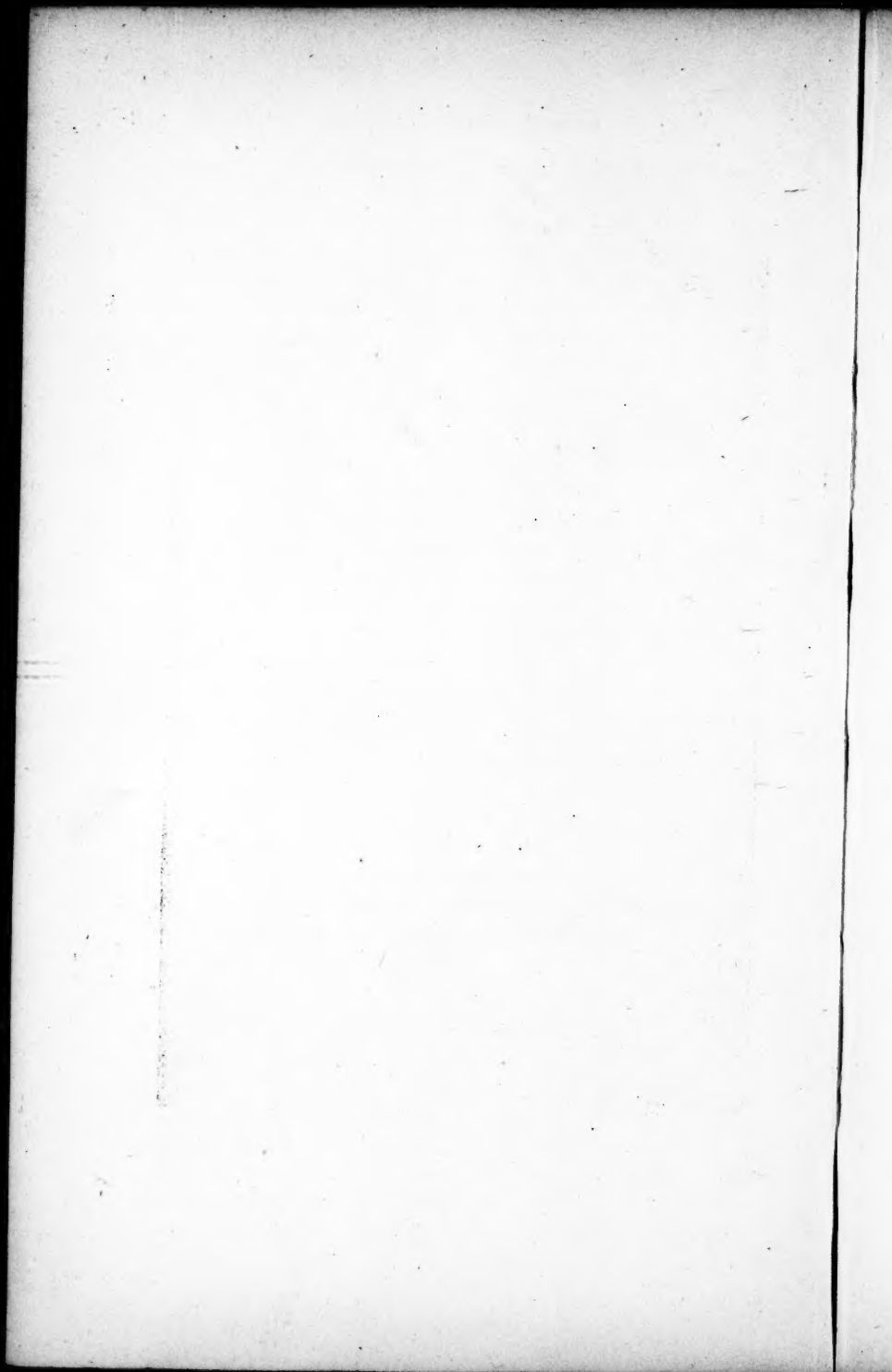
Reassured by the declaration of peace and mollified by the tip, the instinct of obedience—conjured back by the name on the card he held—resumed its sway. "Well, sir," he said, "if it's as



WHY DID HE NOT DASH FORWARD AND MAKE SURE?

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important as that—seeing we are going away abroad to-morrow morning, and you wouldn't have another chance—I'll risk it. Better come in, sir—and if you wouldn't mind waiting in the hall whilst I——”

So the man ran upstairs and Laidlaw waited in the hall. “Ah!” he thought as he looked around him, “if these things could speak?” As his eyes wandered around they fell on what looked at first like a silk handkerchief that some one had dropped close to the door. He picked it up. It was not a silk handkerchief, but a combination of silk and satin and lace which had once been part of the train of a woman's dress, from which it had been torn with great violence. He took it under the light and made sure of it. It had belonged to the dress worn by the woman who had left in the hansom cab. There was barely time to crush it up together and thrust it in his vest, when Captain Randolph's man appeared and bade him “step up.”

He found the passage lumbered with boxes and cases and portmanteaus, and every table and chair in the room into which he was shown was occupied with things to be packed—not merely clothes, but pictures, ornaments, and so on; evidencing not only a departure, but an abandonment. “They counted on my continued absence,” Laidlaw muttered to himself, “and would have eloped in the morning.”

In a few minutes Randolph appeared from the bed-room dressed in pyjamas and jacket to match buttoned up high around his throat. There was a haggard, pain-struck look upon his face which Laidlaw did not notice then.

“This is rather a late visit, Mr. Laidlaw,” he began.

“I will make it as short as I can if you will tell me at once who was that woman who left your door ten minutes ago.”

Randolph frowned. “What's that to you?” he asked angrily.

“Read that,” said the other, handing him the letter we know of, “and you will see.”

Randolph changed colour as he read, and his lower lip quivered till he got it tight under his teeth.

“I admit,” he replied gravely, “that I had the honour of a visit from Mrs. Laidlaw at one o'clock, but that question of yours related to ten minutes ago.”

“I found this in your hall, torn off by your visitor, *how* you know best. What is it to me, indeed! for my wife to spend

eleven hours alone with such a man as you are. Man! you are not a man. You are a ravening wild beast to which nothing is pure, nothing is sacred. It would be no more a crime to kill such as you than to shoot a mad dog; I ought to kill you."

"You easily could," Randolph replied, quite unmoved by this furious outburst, "only, allow me to suggest that as I am suffering from an incurable disease, and am going to the south of France, as I think, to die, it would be hardly the thing for you to exert your undoubted strength on me after the manner of a jealous costermonger. I must leave to-morrow, but if the result of this conversation leaves you still under the impression that I ought to be killed, I will wait a reasonable time in Paris and give you every opportunity to try. I shall, I daresay, be strong enough to pull a trigger for some time, and my impression is that a man who holds his wife's honour as light as you do can be as easily spared by her and society at large as the mad dog you were good enough to introduce into the conversation just now."

"You know what dress my wife wore when she was here."

"Indeed I do not. She remained for about two minutes. She did not even sit down. Sanders (my man) was in and out of the room all the time. She came to wish me good-bye—she did so, and left."

"But have you met since?"

Randolph reflected for a moment. "Well, frankly, yes, for about one minute at the theatre."

"The theatre."

"Yes. She went to the Comedy with her sister and La Trobe. A hundred people can tell you that."

"Why did not you say so before?" asked Laidlaw, with a sigh of relief.

"You didn't give me a chance; you rush up here at midnight, looking like a murderer, and with the right end of your mission in your hand, deliberately and offensively begin at the wrong one. If you had asked me with common courtesy how long Mrs. Laidlaw was here, and if I knew what she had been doing for the rest of the day, you would perhaps have had your answer. But you have never treated me fairly, Laidlaw. If you had done so there would have been no necessity for my old playmate to come *here* to wish me good-bye."

"You have made your reputation for yourself, not I for you."

Randolph's reply was half a scoff, half a smile.

"If your story be true," Laidlaw went on, "how do you account for this?" again exhibiting the wreckage he had picked up in the hall.

"I do not allow you to qualify my statements with an 'if' they be true. Take them, or disregard them, as you please, but be civil. As for that rag, which you seem to think so much of, I know nothing at all about it."

"If you would only tell me who it was that left just now you would take an immense load off my mind."

"Go home and ask your wife how she passed the day and the evening, and you will know all you are entitled to learn. Leave me and my affairs alone," said Randolph.

Laidlaw went up to his wife's room and knocked at the door. He heard a frightened "Whose there? Come in," and the next moment she was in his arms.

"Oh, I am so glad! so *very* glad. What has——? No, I won't ask; I am so glad you have come," she sobbed.

He put her from him to look at her. She wore a dressing-gown and bed-room slippers, but her hair was in full dress.

"You have been crying," he said.

"Yes, I felt low and miserable, but now you have come——"

"You had a painful parting to-day with Captain Randolph?"

She flushed crimson. "Some one has told you. I am sorry for that, because I wanted to tell you all about it first. I wrote to you to-night. You will get the letter to-morrow. Dear Lawrence, what could I do? He is such an old friend. You will never know how good he has been to dear mamma, and—and—all of us. And he is not the man he was, Lawrence; he is dying. When you forbade him the house and I promised not to speak to him, he was strong and bright and had crowds of friends. That was last year. Well, ever since we came back to town I have been wondering what had become of him—not that I wanted to see him, you know"—this quickly and with embarrassment—"and I heard others asking what had become of him, and at last I found out from Sir William. No, I did not ask him. Lady Joyce asked him, and he said he was a doomed man and was going abroad—he didn't say to die, but he looked it. That was this very morning. If I could have explained everything in a

telegram I would have asked your leave, dear ; so I went. I was not there ten minutes ; I didn't even sit down"—his very words ; was this prearranged ?—"I said, ' God bless you for all your kindness to me and mine,' and came away. Say that I was not wrong ?"

"You were very wrong, but we will speak more of this hereafter. What else did you do yesterday ?"

"I took Cora and Tom to the play ; I was feeling dull and thought it would cheer me up."

"And at the theatre you saw Captain Randolph again ?"

"He passed us in the passage—that was all."

"What dress did you wear ?"

"There it is on the sofa," blue satin covered with white lace.

"Did Cora and Tom dine here ?"

"No, I had an early dinner with them, and gave the servants the rest of the evening to themselves."

"And Tom saw you home, of course ?"

"No, I wouldn't let him. He put me into a cab. They are early folks, you know."

"Do you remember that dress of yours you used to call your copper pheasant ?"

"Of course—it's one of my pets."

"I would be much obliged if you would show it me for a moment."

"My dear ! I really don't know where to look for it."

"Isn't Mason up ?"

"I gave her a holiday till to-morrow to be with her sister, who is going out to India with the Days."

"You dressed yourself for the theatre, then ?"

"My dear love ! before I married you I always dressed myself."

"Oblige me by trying to find the copper pheasant."

"Oh dear ! I'm so tired."

"Not so very much, or you would have taken down your hair and gone to bed."

"Won't it do in the morning ?"

"Not so well as now. Come, I will help you."

They beat every sort of cover for the copper pheasant, but it was not to be found.

* * * *

The result of the above conversation and some further questioning seemed to establish about as clear an *alibi* as could be desired. Mrs. Laidlaw left Randolph's chambers at a quarter past one. She was at her sister's house in Cavendish Square (having purchased the box in Bond Street on the way) at two. She remained there till five, when she went home to dress for the theatre; dressed in light blue satin and white lace; was back to dinner with the La Trobes at seven; and home again about twelve. Having given the servants the evening to themselves, she had borrowed a latch-key and let herself in. But Laidlaw's mind was not in a state to believe anything which ran counter to the preconceived dictates of his jealousy and did not precisely account for the thing upon which his worst suspicions were founded. If the copper pheasant dress had been produced *intact* there would have been an end to doubt. He convinced himself that the rags picked up in Randolph's hall belonged to his wife's famous dress, and contained the clue to the truth—the horrid truth. He had only his wife's word—and Randolph's—that she had gone to the theatre. Her refusal to accompany him to Kilenden, her sending the servants—even her own maid—out of the way, and borrowing a latch-key, seemed strange. What was Randolph—a man to whom the night air or any excitement was supposed to be fatal—doing at a theatre?

He passed a sleepless night, and went to the La Trobes' in time to catch them at breakfast. I say "them," because Cora La Trobe was one of those women who consider that a working husband deserves to have his breakfast given to him.

Their first words were, "How is Lily?"

"Pretty well, I think—why do you ask?"

"The gas gave her a headache. We were at the theatre last night; didn't she tell you?" said her sister.

"Oh, yes. Did she look well—what dress did she wear?"

"I really couldn't say; she had an opera cloak down to her heels. Tom, do you remember what she wore?"

"Not I. Something smart as usual."

There the subject was changed to that which gave Laidlaw an excuse for his early call.

As he was leaving the house he found Mason, his wife's maid, on the steps with a letter.

"From my mistress to Mrs. La Trobe, sir," she explained. "I was to give it into her own hands."

"I am going back. I will do so," he said. As he spoke he snatched it from her, and returned into the house, bidding her go home.

What could his wife have to write to her sister when they had been together so much of the day and night before? He pretended that he had forgotten something—his gloves, I know not what—keeping that note crushed up in his hand, and his hand plunged in his pocket.

He gave Mason time to get well out of the way, and then he left again, crossed over to the opposite side of the square, and there with a sneaking sense of shame and fear he opened the note and read this:

"For God's sake do not let any one know that I left you at the theatre last night. Tell Tom I rely upon him. There is no harm. Trust me and keep my secret till I can explain all. Will see you to-morrow without fail.

"LILY."

He hurried back, and found that his wife had left home shortly after him. Had she gone to rejoin Randolph? The concluding line of the letter to her sister seemed to answer "no," but it might have been written to deceive and gain time. Two o'clock, four o'clock, six o'clock passed, and she came not. Laidlaw improved the occasion by cross-examining the servants (a low thing to do, but quite within the limits to which a jealous man will stoop), and they, scenting a row, and satisfied upon which side their bread would be buttered, made some mischief and suggested more.

As the clocks were striking nine Mrs. Laidlaw returned, her eyes red with weeping, faint, travel-stained, and in a highly nervous condition.

Then followed a scene I will not attempt to describe. Stung by what she called the treacherous intercepting of her letter and his interpretation of her servants' tales, the wife refused to her husband the explanation she had promised her sister. "I was not with Captain Randolph. I did no harm," was all she would say. She would not tell him where she had been since breakfast

time, and even with Mason's aid the copper pheasant dress could not be produced. One hot bitter word led to another, and the end was—what we know. But society was left to guess the reason, and never got at the rights of it.

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN'S INSTINCTS.

LAIDLAW'S travels extended over four years. He wandered aimlessly over such parts of Europe and the East as were freest from the ordinary tourist, doing no good, impairing his health, changing only his skies, and brooding over his wrongs. At last he had to seek some of the appliances of civilization; for in real life rheumatism may be depended upon to put a stop to the vagaries of would-be Manfreds. He cast around for the quietest place in which to find relief for this prosaic affliction, and his choice fell upon Wildbad. At first he took what passed for private apartments, but he found them so numerous occupied that he was driven to one of the hotels. The activity of the Wurtemberg flea precludes the idea that he visits its chief health resort for the use of the waters, but his intelligence is such as to suggest that he cannot possibly be a native of the soil. I was once under the impression that the Egyptian flea could find his way to one's skin through any construction or complication of attire quicker than any other aptera, but then I had not been to Wildbad and tried private apartments.

Laidlaw having his choice of human companions chose his own countrymen as the less madding crowd. He made some acquaintances, one of which was to have an important influence on his future.

It began out of pity. Said the lady, "Who is that poor man? He looks so wretched and lonely. Somebody introduce him, please." And she was obeyed. They began with a good deal of aversion. The gentleman did not want the introduction—the lady resented the coolness with which it was met. For the first time in his life Laidlaw found himself pooh-poohed and snubbed by a woman. She argued as Molière's chambermaid fenced—all out of rule—but she hit, and the hits smarted. She had been heard to call him "that sulky prig!" and he had turned his back upon her in the park muttering, "That unbearable woman."

Nevertheless they foregathered. There was pique on both sides. He was getting better, and the consciousness of returning health—what will not that delicious sensation do?—put him in a good humour with his kind, and his vanity required that he should be “in it” with the most attractive woman in the hotel.

On her part, under all her snubs, she recognized him as a head and shoulders (intellectually) above the other men. By a sort of tacit treaty they buried the hatchet. As he became less dogmatic she ceased to be flippant and they made friends.

One afternoon, before this pact was established, as they were strolling in the zig-zags above the park, amidst the odour of the pines and the scent of blooming heather, he began, apropos of nothing :

“Do you know, Lady Nixon, that I am a married man, separated from my wife?”

“Yes, I do,” she replied cheerily; “and that is why I let you walk about with me. It is so nice” (with a sigh) “to be with a man who cannot make love to one. You have no idea how I am bored down there” (indicating the hotel). “There is a Russian who thinks I believe he is a prince, but I know he is a timber merchant at Revel; and a real Belgian baron, and an English amateur jockey—the creature in the tight trousers, who drinks beer at dinner—and they have all marked me for their own. As we are on confidences, I suppose you know I am a widow?”

Laidlaw bowed: “I have heard so.”

“And I daresay have been told how much I have a year? Well, I am really pretty well off; so what have I to gain by marrying any one? I don’t want the Russian’s money or the Belgian’s title, and as for that wretched little horsey man, I wouldn’t have him if he were a prince—he is so utterly stupid. Now *you* are pleasant—sometimes.”

Laidlaw winced. “Will you tell me,” he asked, “how I can be pleasant always?”

“I will. In the first place, by never forgetting what you told me just now; and then by being—being—I don’t know how to express it, except in some slang my brother used to use—by not being so *cock-sure* about everything. Other people, you know, have opinions.”

“Opinions, Lady Nixon, are worth nothing unless they are

founded upon admitted facts, or are the natural sequence of correctly stated premises. Now a premise——"

"Oh, please don't! I came out to enjoy this beautiful day, and to talk—not to be preached at."

"If you were a man I should be obliged to consider that as rude."

"Being a woman, I am entitled to say, *don't be a prig!*"

"We shall never get on at this rate. You will not let me state why I expect to be heard with respect upon subjects which I have studied far more deeply—I may say this without vanity—than any of those brainless fops and obstinate old fogies who——"

"My dear Mr. Laidlaw, that is just it. Why play the school-master with a lot of men and women who have left school, and who never went to your school at all? In our society one mustn't be sure of anything. One is not allowed to say this is Tuesday. One must say, 'I think this is Tuesday—isn't it?' Or, if he has to assent that two and two make four, one has to qualify with a 'Don't you think so?' Leave fools to their folly and keep your pearls in their case."

"This is meant well."

"Indeed it is."

There was an expression in her face that he had never seen there before.

"I take it as friendly."

"Do you want a friend?"

"No one more. God help me!"

"To reconcile you with your wife," she said quickly, more as an assertion than a question.

"No—no—that is impossible."

"Why impossible? I ask as the friend you say you need. I suppose it was your fault?"

"Who told you that?"

"Your own actions. I was in town when—you know. You threw up everything and went abroad."

"Does that prove that I was to blame?"

"It couldn't have been anything very bad. There was no divorce case."

"Do you think that I would publish my disgrace?"

"If I were a man," said Lady Nixon, with flashing eyes, "I'd as soon go about in filthy rags as leave a bad woman to bear

my name. But you are not that sort—you are too self-conscious, too vain. You think because you could do such a thing it must be right. You have not the moral strength to cut deep. You think that your case would dwell for ever in the public eye; whereas it would be thrown aside and forgotten like the old newspaper that reported it."

"By your own showing, I am a man who has suffered wrong. Why credit me only with ignoble reasons for resenting it to the bitter end? I once loved my wife very dearly."

"If she was a good woman when you married her, and what you call loving her included taking care of her, then I am more fixed than ever in my idea that it was your fault. I have a woman's instinct about it. You are just the sort of man to jump at a conclusion and stick to it, because it is *your* conclusion, and makes you suffer. I suppose you were jealous and made a row, and went off in a tiff."

"I had good cause."

"Cause! I tell you that a man who marries a good woman and loves her—with all that implies—has no cause for jealousy, unless he behaves like an idiot. With a splendid start, and everything else in the race heavily weighted, he ought to be ashamed of himself if he don't take the lead and keep it to the end. I judge others by myself. I wasn't well brought up. My brother got all the money, and we girls were taught in the nursery that we had to catch rich husbands—somehow. My dear old man (bless his heart; he was a general on earth and ought to hold the same rank amongst the angels) was over fifty and I twenty-two when we married. There was no love in it; but he was good and generous and kind, and took care of me. I'm nearly thirty now, but I can tell you that in those days I was considered a pretty woman—no, don't interrupt; of course I know what you're going to say—and had lots of men running after me, and he laughed at them. I shall never forget one day when he came in and found me with a very dangerous character. I introduced him, and he said, 'Ah, you are the man who makes love to the smart married women. All right, make love to my wife,—it will amuse her. Maggie dear, come and give me a kiss.' I threw my arms round his neck and gave him a dozen, whilst he looked over my shoulder and laughed. The man was so disgusted he never called again.

I never wronged my husband by a thought,—I hadn't time; he was always being kind and making me honour him."

"Your experience is an exceptional one. You ran great risks—both of you. Such unions are unnatural and——"

"Yes, that is what my brother said—dear Willie! I was his favourite sister. Well, he came home just before I was to be married, and said, 'You can't possibly care for old Nixon, Maggie; and he's a fool to think of a young wife. Throw him over, and I'll settle a thousand a year on you.' I very nearly gave in. I'm so glad I didn't now."

"You could be true to your promises."

"Oh dear no. It was just a matter of time. Don't give me credit for what I don't deserve. Things had gone too far. It was like tripping and losing one's balance, don't you know. At first the slightest touch will straighten you up, but, this moment passed, down you go. Poor old Willie was too late, and—as I said before—I'm glad of it. Now, what I want to say is this, I married for mere selfish, sordid ends. I hated my step-mother, wanted to get out of my younger sister's way, and sold myself for a good house and fine dresses. Well, if my dear old husband could keep a bad bargain like me straight and happy, a man like you should be ashamed of himself if he let a woman like your wife go to the bad."

"She is fortunate in having such a warm defender," he said bitterly.

"I never knew her except by sight. My dear old man used to rave about her. If he had been thirty I daresay that in spite of all my preaching I should have been jealous. I once played her a shabby trick—just a woman's whim, you know; nothing really bad. I don't suppose she ever knew of it. So I really have nothing to prejudice me in her favour."

"But find plenty to set you against me."

"Will you answer me this?" she asked, turning round and facing him, "Does any impartial person join you in thinking you had good cause?"

"I did not consult any one," he replied stiffly. "I acted for myself, by myself. I consider myself the best guardian of my own honour, and the only competent judge of my own wife."

"That settles it," said Lady Nixon. "Let us go down now. It is getting late."

The emphatic tone in which this verdict was given took the sting out of some previous utterances, and the smile with which it was pronounced threw a new light upon them. He began to ask himself why had he not "cut deep?" Why had he made up his mind so hastily that he would never marry again?

Here it should be said that the compliment Lady Nixon had interrupted was as well deserved as anything of the kind can be. Whatever she might have been at twenty-two, she was a remarkably handsome woman at thirty—more than attractive, bright and thoroughly companionable. Laidlaw more than once caught himself thinking how good a thing it would be if he could succeed to the happiness which old General Nixon had enjoyed; with the advantages which youth gave him to improve upon it.

So he wrote to his lawyers asking if he could yet take steps to free himself from a bondage he had begun to loathe. The reply was very frigid.

"You did not honour us," they wrote, "with a statement of the facts under which your separation from Mrs. Laidlaw took place, but, however strong they may appear now, we are afraid that a delay of nearly four years would lead the court to imagine either that you did not attach importance to them at the time they were fresh in your memory, or that you seek relief for extraneous reasons. We cannot, therefore, advise a suit.

"Not having any address where we could write to you, we have been unable to inform you that Mrs. Laidlaw has not drawn the allowance paid (by your direction) to her account. Also that a child was born in the November of the year in which you left England. We feel a delicacy in offering advice on this subject, but think it our duty to remind you that a large portion of the Kilenden and Nun's Compton properties are freehold."

Read between the lines he took this to mean, "You would not ask advice. You have thrown away your rights. You have met some one you want to marry, but it is too late." With regard to the allowance, he concluded that his wife had some sense of shame left which prevented her from touching his money. The news about a child raised strange emotions in his heart. Let me do him the justice to say that the cruel words he had used on this subject were the creatures of hot anger, sparks that flew and blazed, and went out; but not until they had left their scar. How he had longed for a boy! How hard it was that in three

years of happy married life offspring had been denied him, and that now—wifeless, hopeless, loveless—he should be a father!

The touch of a pretty gloved hand disturbed these bitter reflections.

"You have bad news, my friend?"

He snatched up the letter which had fallen at his feet and refolded it hastily.

"Oh, don't be afraid," said Lady Nixon. "I have not looked at your letter. I see it in your face."

"Yes," he replied, "I have had bad news on a matter we have discussed. You were right. I trusted too much to my own judgment, and it has wrecked my life."

"Some of it. Dear friend, do not let false pride keep you from saving what remains. We poor women are very forgiving, and after all these years your wife——"

The sadness flew from his face, dispelled by a flash of anger.

"I thought we had disposed of her. When we last spoke on the subject you agreed with me—I remember your words: you said, 'That settles it.'"

"And I remember yours. I asked you if one disinterested person agreed with you, and you said you had not consulted any one; that you were the best guardian of your own honour and the only competent judge of your own wife. Now, they say that when a man is his own lawyer he has a fool for a client; but when one sets up to be not only his own lawyer but his judge and jury in his own case, one is apt to be something worse. Settles it! Yes, it did settle it. I always thought you were in the wrong, and then I *knew* it."

"I shall not attempt to undeceive you, Lady Nixon," he replied. "It seems strange that you should be so obstinate—so confident upon an instinct, and yet blame me for depending upon facts. I was referring just now to my neglect to take advantage of the law. That it is which has wrecked my life."

"Let us change the subject. Have you made up your mind where you will go from this?"

"I would like to go to Paris."

Lady Nixon turned aside, and became busy folding her parasol.

"I would rather you did not," she said in a low voice, but quite firmly. "I have to go there on a sad errand—to see the monu-

ment I have ordered for my dear brother's grave. Did I tell you that he died in Paris? It was very sudden. He was always well and strong till he was seized with that dreadful *angina pectoris*—and then he had a morbid desire to hide, poor fellow! and conceal his sufferings. He was sent abroad by his doctor to be quiet, as the least emotion might be fatal. Why he should have gone to such a place as Paris to be quiet we never made out, but there he went, and received some shock, and it killed him. No one was there at the time to see to the removal of his body, and when we were able to act it was too late. Some legal nonsense I never could understand. So do not go to Paris—at least, not just now.”

“I see,” he replied bitterly, “you give me up. I am good enough for this dull place, but elsewhere would only bore you.”

“That is unjust. I have given you a good reason. Now listen and don't be foolish; I like you very much. I never thought when I first saw you that I could even like you half so much as I do. You have done me lots of good, never mind how. Making me know how rude I sometimes am for one thing. Outside your own case (about which I will not give in; but we won't talk of it again) I find you a just, tolerant and kind-hearted man, and a most agreeable companion. At first you hated me—yes, you did! because I had to take you out of your brown studies by making you cross; I dare you to deny that this wasn't good for you. It made you think of something else. And then we got cheery together when that horrid subject was out of our minds. My mission is to be cheery with you. Yours is to teach me, oh! lots of things, and I'm going to be good; now you've put away your cane. So much for giving you up. Well, if we meet in Paris and we're both in the dumps, we shall quarrel—really.”

“I could help you. I could sympathize with you,” he pleaded, “after what I have learned to-day and you have just said. God bless you for it! I am not fit to be left alone. I will tell you everything; I will prove to you beyond the possibility of doubt that I am an innocent, outraged man. I have thrown away one chance of freedom, but there may be others. Let me go to Paris with you. I will take further advice. I was wrong, but I erred from good motives. No judge worthy of the name would ignore them; besides, there might not be any opposition. I should gain my divorce, and then——”

"Another word, Mr. Laidlaw, and it will be not only not in Paris, but never—anywhere," said Lady Nixon, rising. "Alas! for what I thought was friendship. You have taught me another lesson, for which I thank you more than for all the rest."

With these words, sadly spoken, but with the dignity of just offence, she left him.

The next day they parted.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHOLE TRUTH.

LAIDLAW lingered at Wildbad long after his last bath was taken and the doctor had given him up in the happy sense of the term. He made no new acquaintances, and had nothing to do but to walk about alone, listen to the band (whose pieces he knew by heart) and to read the newspapers, which of late years he had sadly neglected. One day, looking over an elderly *Galvani*, his eye fell upon an article copied from a London daily, and it interested him. It was headed, FRAUD UPON A LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY, and ran thus:

"It is a common saying that one half the world does not know how the other half lives, but if the story told in a trial which took place yesterday at the Old Bailey be at all common it is almost equally doubtful how a good many people die. A certain Elias Romero was indicted for perjury (complicated with one or more forgeries and conspiracy) under the following circumstances. A gentleman once well known on the turf as Captain Shackleford having had a bad time—indeed, several bad times—plunging, was induced to insure his life for ten thousand pounds and to assign the policy to the prisoner, with a view of obtaining a loan to meet his most pressing necessities, by which was meant racing losses and bills given on 'debts of honour' not unconnected with cards. These proceedings were so far *bonâ fide*. The prisoner, though domiciled for many years in London as a 'financial agent,' was a native of Peru, and had this redeeming quality, he took care of his poor countrymen. With one of these, whom he had picked up starving in the street, he went to Ramsgate (whether on business or pleasure does not appear), took a boat, proposed a bathe, when some miles from shore, and there his companion was drowned—all *bonâ fide* again, so far. As no body was found, there could be no inquest.

Here the fraud commenced. Romero, who had hitherto spoken of the drowned man only as 'my friend,' imagined it during the long row to shore, and when questioned by the police stated, with well-simulated grief, that his lost companion was Captain Shackelford, and hurried back to London to break the news to his family. He was, however, in no hurry to perform this painful duty. He did not see the widow (?) till the third day after his arrival, and what passed in the interim may be imagined. Captain Shackelford was not happy in his domestic circle, having left it to take care of itself—no fault of its own—for several years. He lived in lodgings, which he had left locked up. The door was broken open with all the proprieties by Romero, assisted by a gentleman from Scotland Yard and a clerk from the insurance company. Here, on the dear departed's writing-table, was found an unfinished letter, which ran :

"DEAR JACK,

"Very sorry, but I cannot come. Am going with Romero to Ramsgate. Must not offend him, because I owe him a lot of money, but would much rather——"

"Something had interrupted him and no more was written. Romero made his claim, supported by his own affidavit and the evidence of the boatman, who swore that a photograph (undoubtedly of Shackelford) was the likeness of that poor gentleman who was drowned.

"The insurance company gave in and paid. The insurance company had its suspicions. (As insurance companies will have.) The insurance company bided its time. (As insurance companies will do.) First of all, there appeared in the *Times* and other papers an advertisement for one Signor Maria Jeglesaa, of Peru, who was implored to send his address to his family, or to Mr. Richard Scobell, of 105, Aldermanbury. Mr. Richard Scobell stated in reply to inquiries made in the interests of the insurance company, that when the missing man was last heard of he was in the employ of Mr. Romero, financial agent, of Bond Street. This clue was followed up, and soon the scent of a large rat was found. Mr. Romero had disappeared, leaving several anxious creditors, and a gentleman answering to the character and appearance of Captain Shackelford had been heard of at Monaco.

"Still, no certain proof of the fraud was forthcoming till in an evil hour the captain came back to London penniless and dying.

He was traced to a miserable lodging in Frith Street, Soho, where, on the 27th May, 18—, nearly three years after the waters of the English Channel had closed (according to Romero) over his head, he died effectually.

"From letters found in a desk—about his only property—it appeared that he and Romero had divided the ten thousand pounds between them, and that he was constantly asking for more. The ex-financial agent of Bond Street was disclosed by this correspondence, under several aliases, in various quarters of the globe. It took a long time to trace him, and when he was found, his extradition could not be obtained without considerable trouble and delay. He struggled hard, but the case was too clear, and he was sentenced yesterday to ten years' penal servitude by the Lord Chief Justice. The most painful part of the case is that the prosecution were obliged to identify the "captain" by the testimony of his daughter, who was present at his death. For this reason, and for some others which need not be mentioned here, this lady is entitled to our respectful sympathy."

These last words burned like letters of flame in Laidlaw's eyes. He began the reading with a feeling of disgust. Here was more shame upon him. Every one would remember that the "captain" was his wife's father. But she was at his death-bed on that dreadful 27th of May! When? Not, surely, before she called on Randolph. The article he had read was but a *résumé* of a trial held "yesterday." After long search he obtained a copy of that day's paper, and read the evidence given by his wife—thus:

Mr. Roland (for the prosecution): "Are you the wife of Mr. Lawrence Laidlaw?"

Witness: "I am."

Mr. Roland: "He is abroad, I believe?"

Witness: "He has been abroad for some years."

Mr. Roland: "What was your father's name?"

Witness: "Wallace Shackleford."

Mr. Roland: "Do you remember the night of the 27th May, 18—?"

Witness (after a long pause): "I do."

Mr. Roland: "Where did you pass it?"

Witness: "In a house in Frith Street, Soho."

Mr. Roland: "Had you previously heard of your father's death?"

Witness: "I had. We all believed it."

Mr. Roland: "There is no imputation against you, Mrs. Laidlaw, on that ground. How came it that you went to that house in Soho?"

Witness: "An old friend of the family met me at the theatre, and gave me a note in which ——"

Mr. Montague (for the defence): "I object, my lord, to the contents of that note being given."

Mr. Roland: "I don't ask for them. In consequence of what you read you went to the house in Soho?"

Witness: "I did. I pretended that the gas had given me a headache, and left the theatre early."

Mr. Roland: "Did you see your father that night?"

Here the witness sobbed bitterly, and the judge asked if the fact could not be proved *aliandi*.

Mr. Roland: "I am sorry to say, my lord, that it cannot."

The Judge: "You must answer the question."

Witness: "I did."

Mr. Roland: "That will do, Mrs. Laidlaw."

Under cross-examination, she said that she had not seen her father for several years, that the room was dark, and that she was labouring under great excitement.

The next witness was the detective who had worked up the case for the insurance company.

"I felt *almost* sure," he deposed, "that I had my man, and taxed him with being Captain Shackleford. He replied, 'Never mind who I am. I'm dying. I can't get away from you—or death. Will you do one thing for a dying man?' I said if it was reasonable I would. He said, 'Go to Captain Randolph' (giving me his address) 'and tell him this, "The man you lent a hundred one night at the Singletons' and got out of a bad scrape at baccarat is dying, and wants to see Lily. Bring her or send her, but be careful not to frighten her."' I found the captain, and told him those very words, for I took 'em down, and he seemed knocked all of a heap. He went for the lady to the Comedy Theatre, and put her in a cab. I saw the lady come out alone and followed her afterwards to Curzon Street, where she lived. It was after midnight then."

Cross-examined: "I knew the captain by sight before his death was reported. He was a fine-looking man. He was very much changed when I saw him last. I will not swear that I recognized him by his face."

Such was the report, so far as we need follow it. You, who read it with ordinary care, see at once how the facts apply to the conviction that had become so deeply rooted in Laidlaw's mind. For a long time he could only see before him a quantity of words floating around a vague but hideous shadow of shame. More than once his eyes wandered from the column, and he found them passing over a notice of a new play or some puff about soap. At last the truth came into focus, and with its strong steady hand grasped the lies he had cultivated, and began to tear them up by the roots, out of his heart. What if she were mistaken about the man who died in Frith Street? *She was there.* She came at nine and left after twelve. Right or wrong in her identification of the man said to be her father, she could not have spent those hours with Randolph. Let the prisoner be guilty or no, *her* innocence became more and more certain. At this stage he ceased to struggle against the uprooting of what he now recognized as foul weeds, and set himself to justify their planting. To do this it became necessary to blame the woman he had wronged. Why had not she trusted him? If she had only told him where and how she had passed that night! This fell like balm, till he remembered that he had not asked for any explanation, that having demanded in vain the production of her "copper pheasant" dress, he threw her note to Mrs. La Trobe (literally) in her face and began to rave denunciations and abuse. Was ever man so juggled with by fate? Why, when he produced the stuff he found in Randolph's hall, she actually claimed it as part of her missing gown! Was not this of itself enough to excuse him? She must have been there (at Randolph's). What more natural than that having heard from him that her father was dying, she should seek him when all was over to ask for advice and assistance. She must have gone to him after the detective had left her. But the detective had followed her to her home to find out who she was. Could she have gone out again? If so, she would not have had time to mount Randolph's staircase. She must have arrived just as he (her husband) passed the house and left in three minutes afterwards. Under this relief he drew his first free breath. She was not to blame—poor Lily! and he—yes, he had some excuse. Small consolation this for a man who had been sure *beyond a doubt.*

What was to be done? The answer to this came quick as

echo upon sound. Seek sound-hearted Maggie Nixon, make a clean breast of it to the woman whose instincts had been right all through, and do whatever she told him. Somehow or other it seemed to him years since they had parted, and only yesterday that he had left his wife. Poor Lily! Poor dear Lily! And then he fell to wondering if his child was a boy, and what he was like.

CHAPTER V.

PARDON AND PEACE.

WE will now go back, if you please, to the morning of the 28th May. Lily Laidlaw awoke with a dim sense of being in trouble with her husband, but she had work to do which pressed this back almost out of range. And really it did not promise to be serious. He had deferred the inevitable scolding for having gone to wish Randolph good-bye, and had passed on to speak about a dress. Surely, she thought, the bitterness of that has passed. She was glad to find he had gone out when, after a feverish sleep, she woke in the morning; for this left her free for her more pressing work. She had to provide for the burial of her father in such a manner as to carry out his last wishes breathed in faltering whispers as she knelt by his bed-side. "Kiss me, Lily," he said, "and forgive me. And, dear, have me buried decently in the country, anywhere out of this cursed city. Remember, I'm an old servant. Webster is the name I took. Keep it up; keep it up, Lily. I always loved you best; don't disgrace me, Lily dear—promise that?"

She made the promise. She thought she could perform it. She did not know that a detective followed her home and found out all about her. She did not know that she was allowed to take the body and bury it as that of Thomas Webster in a quiet Hampshire churchyard, merely because Mr. Romero had to be kept in the dark. She thought that her secret was safe; that she would easily get her sister to screen her departure from the theatre, or, if the worst came to the worst, she might confide in her. She might even have to trust her husband. The grand object was to keep the disgraceful truth from her mother, whose health—always delicate—was now such that the shock might kill her.

She came back from her woeful journey worn out in body and mind. A burial, the day after death, in a place where the deceased was unknown, presented many difficulties which had to

be overcome. No food had passed her lips all day. She was overwrought, irritable, full of misery ; and the first question put to her by her husband was about a gown ! This rasped. "No," she said, "the 'copper pheasant' had not been found. She had forgotten to ask Mason to look for it. What could that matter ?" She was told in unmeasured terms, and ordered peremptorily to state where she had been all day. This drove her to bay with the result already known.

Tom La Trobe stood up for his sister-in-law before her husband, but in marital privacy declared that it looked awfully bad for her. Unwittingly he made bad worse by discovering that Randolph had not started by the early boat as he had arranged, but sent his man on with his luggage and crossed by the night mail from Dover. You can guess what he was doing. Mason had taken him a note on her way to the La Trobes', and it was thanks to his firm ways and knowledge of mankind that poor Lily left her dead where he wished to rest.

She had broken with her husband on accusations which related to the 27th, and so no further penalty remained for what passed on the following day. Besides, the one explanation would have inevitably led to the other. She kept her own counsel, even to her sister. "Yes," she said, "I did promise to explain it all, but that was before —. I will not lower myself to him *now* ; and it would only pain you, without doing me a bit of good. Let it rest. I am going clean out of your world as though I were dead. Let it rest, dear ; only don't think badly of me. I have done no harm." Her answer was all right in words, but she pitched it in (so to speak) a minor key. Of course Lily had not done wrong. Of course Lawrence would come to his senses, but it was very sad—sad for the speaker and the family, when a little straightforward explanation, &c., &c., &c. Thus the La Trobes.

So Lily went back to her mother, who was living in the Isle of Man, partly for economy and partly for the mild climate ; and then the boy (for boy it was) saw the light. Shortly after his birth Mrs. Shackelford died, and with her the annuity she had purchased when the marriage of her younger daughter led her to suppose that for the future she had only herself to provide for.

Lilly was thereupon left to the usual woman's resources—sewing and teaching—for a living, and with hard work they gave her a cottage and just enough to keep out hunger and cold.

When the trial came on and she had to go to London as a witness, all her ready money went to provide a nurse for the child. Some of her pupils left, as their parents found it very inconvenient to have their studies interrupted. When she came back others were withdrawn, because she had been "mixed up in that disgraceful case." Hunger laid his bony hand on the latch, and want had settled by the darkened hearth long before Laidlaw read that old newspaper.

It was a Sunday night; she sat by the window of the bare room in which her school was held, correcting the exercises of such of her pupils as remained. Her boy was in the one other room asleep. No fire burned in the grate though it was very cold. If the short twilight ended before her task was done and she had to buy a candle, there could be no breakfast next day for her. Out of school fees paid on the Saturday (after providing for rent and the last instalment of a doctor's bill) there remained just enough to keep body and soul together for the next six days. Yet at that moment there were over four thousand pounds to her credit in Drummond's Bank! and she had only to sign her name to draw it! Sorely had she been tempted more than once when the child was ill, but her pride prevailed and saved her the degradation of yielding.

Footsteps crunched on the gravel path outside, and the figure of a man passed the window. She *knew* him before he passed, with that subtle instinct which prepares some of us for great joys or sorrows. She was calm when he stood before her holding out both hands as though his welcome were secure.

She made no movement.

"I have been all day trying to find you," he began. "Are you not even surprised to see me?"

"No," she replied, "after what was published in the newspapers I expected to hear from you before now."

"And this is my welcome?"

She followed his look around the bare ugly room and said:

"All I have to offer."

"It is not my fault that you are so poor."

Man like, he was stung to anger by the sight of the misery he had caused.

"I know you think very badly of me," she said. "But have I really sunk so low in your estimation as to make you think I would touch your money?"

"Say thought, not think, Lily. I have come to ask your forgiveness."

"Why?"

"Because now it is clear that I was cruelly deceived—miserably mistaken."

"Why so—now?"

"The facts which came out at the trial."

"I swore to you just as solemnly as I swore in court—more so, I think—that I had done no wrong; that I had not passed that night as you supposed. Why do you believe the witness when you doubted the wife?"

"Because the story told in court was circumstantial. The detective—"

"Oh, thanks! my solemn protestations went for nothing; but when a thief-taker steps in and says, 'You may believe this woman,' I am restored to credit. That is most just and complimentary! How thankful I ought to be that there was a spy so conveniently at hand."

"Lily, be fair—you gave me no explanation."

"You asked none."

"For that I say from the bottom of my sad heart—I was wrong; forgive me."

"Let us look this thing fairly in the face," she said, folding up the exercises and putting them carefully away. "If you had asked me where I went from the theatre I could not have told you. I am sure I would not have told you. I should have asked you to trust in the honour of a wife who had dearly loved you, who had never thwarted your slightest wish, who was proud of you, and would have laid down her life to save you from a breath of shame; and I would have prayed you not to ask that question. Now, upon your honour as a man, what would you have done?"

He turned pale and bit his lip.

"I do not think that this is fairly looking it in the face," he said after a pause. "You must remember that I had some things—half truths, which I now know to be the blackest of lies—to mislead me. I had a scrap of your dress."

"Yes, and also my oath, given with tears and prayers, that I had not worn it that day. This is only going round in a circle. If I had refused to tell you where I went from the theatre, would

you have trusted to the love and truth of your wife, and discarded the creations of your jealousy?"

"I would not."

"That is an honest admission, and I respect you for it. It brings us back to the old point. I owe this tardy reparation to the word of a policeman."

"It is something," he said, with a long-drawn sigh, "that you call it reparation. You are very pale and thin and, I fear" (looking around again), "are in want. Is he—is the boy—well?"

"Quite well—now."

"May I see him?" (eagerly).

"You once said——"

"For God's sake, Lily, do not remind me of that madness. I have repented it ever since the—words were spoken. For that I have no excuse. For that I will beg your forgiveness on my knees. Lily——"

"No," she interrupted, rising, "that is enough. He is in the next room. You can go to him. He is sometimes a little cross when he is wakened, so be gentle."

* * * * *

"Who are oo?"

Laidlaw found the boy sitting up in his cot, rubbing sleepy blue eyes (the reflection of his own) under rumpled locks (the curl and colour of his own till sorrow had brought the snow), and that was the question, as he clasped him to his heart, and all the devils of pride and jealousy were cast out of him in one happy sob, "*Who are oo?*"

"Your father, darling—hasmamma never spoken of your father?"

"No. What is a father?"

To a four year old this required explanation was difficult.

"A man like mamma," he said at last.

"Doctor James says there is no one like my mamma, so that's a story."

"I mean who loves you as mamma does."

"Do oo love me as mamma does?"

"My darling, yes—I will."

"Then I'll put oo in my prayers."

"May God hear them, and bless your innocent heart."

"I'll say God bless papa and mamma and Mr. Father, and——"

"Why, my child!" he cried in high delight, "father means papa."

"Then why didn't oo say so?" was the astonished reply. "Oo must be a very stupid man."

"Very, my dear—very, but you are a clever child. You can learn things, can't you? if they are said over often. You learned your prayers, you know."

"Yes," said the little fellow proudly, "that I did."

"You say them to dear mamma?"

"Every night and morning."

"And they begin," with a sob, "God bless papa and mamma?"

"Yes, of course they do."

"Well then, the next time, say this, 'and forgive him his sins.'"

"And forgive him his sins," repeated the little child devoutly, clasping his hands.

"The sin of pride."

"The sin of pride."

"And make my dear mamma—"

"And make my dear mamma—"

"Forgive him too."

"Have you been naughty?" This was a relapse into secular tones.

"Almost beyond forgiveness."

"Well, oo say, 'I'm sorry, and I won't do so any more,' and she'll forgive oo. I know she will—she does me—and then she'll cry and kiss you."

"Oh, my boy, my boy!" he sobbed, falling on his knees beside the cot, "for one of her kisses I would give——"

His head was drawn gently back from where it had fallen bowed at the wondering child's feet, and a kiss fell on his brow.

"But I will never know a day's real peace," said Lily, "till I have cleared up that mystery about the copper pheasant."

"My sweet love," said her husband, "you never had a copper pheasant dress. It never was torn. I never found a bit of it."

"That is nonsense, Lawrence."

"It is quite as good sense as what I once thought about it."

"Husband, I wish I had told you the truth—all of it."

"I should have been horridly vexed. I should have said all sorts of bitter things," he replied thoughtfully.

She drew away from him and turned him round to face her.

"Do you really mean to say that I was right in keeping that secret?"

"It was your own."

"Has a wife any right to a secret of her own?"

"That depends entirely upon what sort of a husband she has, my love. This isn't traditional morality, I know, but it's wisdom. You may call it the wisdom of unrighteousness if you like. A woman who is married to a brute or a stuck-up idiot may keep a secret which don't concern him and about which he is likely to make himself obnoxious."

"Sophistry! I ought to have told you the truth, dear; and you would have been awfully cross, I know that, because it would have shown you what a jealous goose you had been; but——"

"But?"

"The misery it would have saved! for I loved you so—I love you so!"

Then tears came. Tears were mingled, and washed out the past for ever.

* * * * *

The first person they called on in London was Lady Nixon, who was there only on a flying visit, and insisted upon their returning with her to her house in the country, which had just been refurnished and needed the usual "warming."

"You see," she said, "when my poor brother died without a will all the property went to us girls, and had to be sold to make the division. Well, as I was the richest I bought the house and now it's quite habitable. Did your husband tell you he made love to me?" (this to Lily). "Why, of course he did. They all do. Did he tell you how I always stuck up for you? He did? Well, that was right, for now you'll like me."

So they went. On the first Sunday there was a charity sermon (there always is, when you go into the country) and of course Lily left her purse behind and Laidlaw was obliged to borrow half-a-crown. Conscious of their impecuniosity, they tried to look unconcerned whilst the offertory was going on, and Lily's eyes fell on a beautiful stained glass window, on which was inscribed

ERECTED IN LOVING MEMORY OF

WILLIAM RANDOLPH

(late captain Scots Guards)

by his sister.

She touched her husband's arm. He followed her glance and read it also.

"I saw you looking at my window," said Lady Nixon as they left the church. "Poor Willie! They would not let me bring his body home."

"Was Captain Randolph your brother?" asked Laidlaw.

"Why, of course. Did we not talk about him at Wildbad?"

"Never by name."

"He was a dear, generous-hearted fellow," said his sister with tears in her honest eyes.

"A kind friend to me, in sad need," said Lily.

"A man I once wronged," said Laidlaw.

"You don't mean to say——"

"I will tell you all, Lady Nixon. You have a right to know."

And he told her.

"My dear," she exclaimed to Lily when he had done (the confession was made that afternoon in her own special room), "it is the most marvellous thing you could imagine. It's like a story out of the 'Arabian Nights.' I told you once" (this to Laidlaw) "that I had played your wife a mean trick. It was this: my dear old man, as I also told you, admired her tremendously. He would walk with me after her in the park and swing his cane, and get red in the face and say—well, I can't repeat exactly what he said. He used to swear, but he didn't mean any harm. His oaths had no shot in them, only they went off with awful bangs. He'd say, 'Dash it! why the dash can't you dress like that woman? You've money enough, but your best gown is a rag in comparison with *that*. Look at it! Dash it! can't you get her dressmaker if you haven't her brains?' Now I couldn't stand this, could I? I went to your dressmaker and she was willing enough to give you away, but she couldn't. I got my maid to try and corrupt yours, but she (for a wonder) was honest. My creature (she robbed me afterwards and married a corporal in the Blues) was a treasure for that sort of thing. She got hold of your under-housemaid, who borrowed that dress when Mason (wasn't that her name?) was out, and then all seemed easy. My poor, dear friend" (to Laidlaw), "you think that scrap you picked up was part of your wife's dress. Oh, no! after running all over London I could never match it *quite*. There was a green shimmer in the gold buckle trimming I could never get, try my best. But it was something like it—near enough for a man, and my old dear was delighted. He insisted upon my wearing it the

CHRIS.

first dinner we went to, and there I learned from one of the Joyces (you know them, don't you ?) that my brother was in town, very ill, and about to leave next day for the south of France. I told you " (to Lawrence) " how he hid his sufferings from us. We left early and I made the general take me to his chambers and there we had a long talk, which didn't interest my dear old man at all. He got sleepy and fidgety over his horses catching cold, so I told him to go home and I would follow in a cab as soon as I had done. Now the night air was said to be bad for poor Willie. When I left I wouldn't let him come out. I closed the door behind me and shut in part of my train. I stopped, and was going to ring, to have it opened, when I thought—no, he'll have to come out. What did I care for a dress in comparison to his health ? I gave a tug at my skirt, thinking it was held only by the hem, and crack ! went a big tear. Then being in for it, I tore myself free, jumped in the cab, and went off. I've got the ruins now, somewhere. I put them away when I went into mourning. Now see what it is to be 'cock-sure !' You two declared war the next day but one, and that second housemaid got away with the borrowed dress. Will you ever forgive me ? "

" There never," said Laidlaw, lifting his eyes and speaking with the utmost gravity, " was a copper pheasant dress—never ! It belongs, as you very properly said just now, to the ' Arabian Nights.' Sindbad the sailor imported it for the Princess Balroolbadoor, and the fair Persian being envious, and desiring to retain the affections of the King of the Isles, engaged Morgiana (with the kind permission of Ali Baba) to borrow it as a pattern. But the one-eyed Callendar——"

" Why, good heavens, Mr. Laidlaw ! " exclaimed Lady Nixon, " you are actually talking nonsense ! What a change ! "

" If it had not been for your good advice, dear friend," he replied in changed tones, " we should even now be firing chilled shot at each other through our attorneys. But you told me what to do, and I did it. You did a lot of good in the one case and meant no harm in the other. So—to continue—the one-eyed Callendar sent for Aladdin, who called the Genius of the Lamp, and giving him the copper pheasant dress, bade him fasten it to three hundred and twenty seven millstones, and sink it in the deepest part of the Indian Ocean."

Afterwards.

WHEN in the crimson west,
Sinks, one sweet eve, the sun,
He will grieve to know the hour of rest,
For all mankind is won.
He will grieve to know that the golden corn,
O'er which his beams are glowing,
Will not fall to the toiling race of men,
On which he shone at the sowing.
He will grieve for the race of men, whose forms
he used to know ;
Whose eyes were oft turned to him, from the
anguished earth below,
Striving loyally to look to him in his strength
above,
Where he symbolized the eternal laws, of work
and love.

When one still night, the moon
Shall in the darkness rise,
With a trail of glory, spreading wide,
Silvering the gloomy skies.
She will grieve to know that her mystic light,
Which once was a beacon true,
Is no more to guide the race of men
From the old world to the new.
She will grieve to know that the women brave,
The mothers and wives she has seen in fear,
Have passed from a world, where to trust and
love,
Is to hide with courage the falling tear.

When the sun and moon are hid,
A glory of stars will rest,
To throb and pant like a human heart
Imprisoned in a breast.
They will grieve for the flowers that bloomed
below,
They hailed with joy their birth ;
For each blossom was like a sister star,
Gladdening the gloomy earth.
They will grieve for the race of children,
Who rejoiced the sad earth with their guiles,
And have vanished away for ever,
With their quick coming laughter and smiles.

For when that day has come,
And the reign of man is o'er,
And silence breathes eternally,
Reaching from shore to shore—
Nature will veil her face, and mourn
For the race that has passed from sight,
For the courage that hoped till the end had
come,
And the patience that waited for light.

Author of "MISS MOLLY."

Uncle Abe.

BY A. N. HOMER,

Author of "RED RUIN," "THE RICHEST MERCHANT IN ROTTERDAM," etc.

WE had crossed the equator. Night was closing in. The wind had hauled aft and had freshened, and the "Sleuthhound"—my own boat—was bowling along under studding sails. A fit of the blues, to which I had recently succumbed, had left me, and I was briskly walking the poop with Evans, the mate, at my side.

"What's she going, Evans?" I asked, addressing him. "Eight knots?"

"Seven, sir, when the log was hove last," he replied.

"She's doing more than that now. Heave it again, will you."

In ten minutes he rejoined me, having carried out my instructions.

"You are quite right, sir," he remarked. "Exactly eight."

"I thought so. Evans, were you ever in New York?"

"Know every foot of it, sir."

"Indeed; so do I."

"Been there half a score of times. Last night I was there I saw 'Rip Van Winkle' played over in Brooklyn. It was on a Saturday. Benefit or something on. Didn't get back to the ship until one o'clock, and we hauled out of dock with the dawn. When I say dock, I mean the quay, of course. We lay at Robinson's Stores. You know the Brooklyn side, sir?"

"Well."

"Robinson's Stores?"

"Yes; well as I know the Sou'-West India Dock."

"You do?"

"I said so."

"So do I."

The conversation was getting interesting, I thought. I was on the verge of discovering a mine of information. I looked along the mate's head. He appeared to have no objection to the investigation. Some time before I left London I had bought a little plaster of Paris cast of a human head, with all the phrenological bumps marked on it. I had studied it carefully; perhaps more with a view to discover whether there were any good bumps on my own, than from love of the thing. But as my eye encountered the mate's, broadside on, I longed to feel it. It looked so big and solid. My fingers itched to begin. I was close upon asking him point blank to take off his cap and let me, when he spoke.

"Your remark about New York, sir, has raked up a cart-load of recollections."

"Good times, eh?"

"Yes, good—very good—and devilish bad, too."

"Oh!"

"Yes; puts me in mind of the very yarn I was going to tell you the other night. You see, sir, I take it that all experiences are practical illustrations of the vicissitudes of life."

"More or less," I answered.

"Well, in the instance I am about to relate, I had a pretty rough time. You see, I've lost a bit out of this ear, sir."

I stopped in my walk and solemnly investigated the flap that was bent down towards me. I assented.

"Well, I'll tell you how that happened, and then you can judge for yourself whether I wasn't in a hole far enough to wish myself out again."

I proceeded to fill my pipe. While I was doing so Evans clawed his beard and appeared deep in thought. There was something coming—I felt that. I sucked at the pipe, which would not draw, but I kept my eye on Evans. Imagination and construction largely developed, I thought to myself, still pulling viciously at the pipe, which at length, in response to my efforts, discharged a bit of tobacco as big as a sizeable pea, to say nothing of filling my mouth with nicotine. I stifled an oath, spat vigorously, and began to pace the poop again.

"Got a light, sir?" asked Evans placidly.

I nodded, for I was bitter on the subject, and having already jumbled an awful oath and an ordinary adjective hopelessly together in my efforts to restrain the former, I did not venture to hazard a remark. I had stifled my just wrath, because of the close proximity of the helmsman, but he had evidently heard more than I had intended, for he was like to let go the wheel with laughing.

"How's her head?" I asked sternly, addressing him.

"South, a half east, sir."

It was the course. I could say nothing. Evans and I started off again, and he began:

"Well, I landed in New York one June, in a brand-new suit of blue serge, and barely enough dollars to jingle together. Where I'd been to, and how I came there, doesn't much matter. I was there, sure enough. I wanted something to eat badly. I can always eat a good two meals a day more in New York than I can in any other place. Well, I wanted breakfast, and I wanted it cheap, so I polished up my memory, and I hit on Sam's. You know Sam's, sir?"

"I'm not sure that I do."

"No, I forgot; you wouldn't. You've probably never been as hard up as I have."

"We'll compare notes some day."

"Well, Sam's is close to Robinson's Stores. When I say close, I mean it's less than ten minutes' walk. That was handy to where I was, and the grub was generally served hot. I knew that, for I had gone there when the weather was bitter, time

valuable, and money scarce. So off I started. Groped my way up a steep wooden ladder furnished with a hand-rail, and after navigating this without barking my shins, for past experience had taught me to be careful, I found myself in a long room or loft. I call it a loft, because there were unmistakable signs of its having been used as such. On both sides of this room, and placed athwart-ships—I mean crosswise—were rough deal tables and equally coarse chairs. One end of each table was jammed against the wall, and they were all decorated alike, with an apology for a white cloth, knives, forks and spoons, while in the centre reposed a cruet-stand. This arrangement of the furniture left a broad space up the middle, and in the centre of this space, and in front of a roaring fire—for there was a break in the chairs and tables, to allow of a grate—stood Sam. He was the acting boss. Waiter and proprietor. Everything but cook. He was about as fat as a prize ox, as black as my shore-going hat, and his teeth were whiter than the best collar I ever put on. Of signs of age he had none, bar the sparseness of his crop of wool, for there wasn't a wrinkle in his face. It just glistened with sleekness and was brimful of good humour. Two or three other customers had straggled in, and Sam took and repeated their orders, something after this fashion. Mind, I may be giving the names of wrong dishes, but this is what I remember. Sam would walk up to a customer and greet him civilly. Sometimes with more warmth. A muttered conversation would follow. At the end of which up would go Sam's head, and he would bawl out, as though he were trying to hail a ship somewhere in the locality of Staten Island :

“‘One clam choulder.’

“Another muttered conversation would be followed by another roar.

“‘One oyster stu.’ That was the way Sam pronounced that succulent dish. Then would come another hum of voices rounded off by a fresh shout :

“‘Two cups kawfee.’

“I ordered a cup of ‘kawfee’ and something more substantial and fell to. The fun, from this part of my story, has departed, for not being a regular customer, my efforts to draw Sam into conversation failed. He was very polite, but he as good as declined to waste time; so I finished my ‘stu’ and ‘kawfee,’ paid the bill, and having made a safe passage to the foot of the ladder again, I

began to look around. I spent a good part of the day in that way, and towards the close of it I came to the conclusion that it wouldn't take much of that kind of thing to secure me a speedy run to Davy Jones' locker. It was beginning to get dusk. Lamps and shop windows were lighted. People were bustling past me homewards, or hastening over their work to do so. I didn't know a soul. Every one appeared to regard me as a house-breaker, on the look-out for a job. Policemen eyed me suspiciously, and every one seemed unfavourably impressed ; at least, so I thought, though I suppose my feelings were only due to the unpleasant sensation of being out at elbows, and I imagined all I have described. Well, I had just turned into Broadway, with the intention of making for Purdie's billiard saloon—where I knew I could sit down without it costing me much—when a smart victoria dashed by, and I heard a voice cry :

" 'It's Uncle Abe. I guess I'm right, ma. Just you turn round and see. Why, of course I am.' "

"The victoria whisked up to where I was standing, for some sort of curiosity had caused me to stop ; and the same voice continued :

" 'He has recognized us too. Uncle Abe, come here this moment, and explain right away why you're in New York without having come to see us.' "

"The words were meant for me. There was no doubt about that. I was Uncle Abe. There were two ladies in the carriage. I had never seen either of them before in my life. Still, I was Uncle Abe. A brilliant idea struck me. If I hesitated I should be lost, or rather left to stand on the pavement, with less than a five dollar bill in my pocket, and about as much idea of where I was to get another greenback from, as a man who starts off in a balloon has of knowing whether he'll fetch the land, or whether he'll catch up with water instead. In about a second I'd decided that I'd play Uncle Abe, so I crossed the pavement that still divided me from the owner of the sweet voice, raised my hat with the best grace I could, and shook hands. The elder lady welcomed me affectionately, the younger one gushingly. I felt that I should like to play Uncle Abe immensely, and it might lead to a better part. Still, uncles usually being influential and respectable—that is, when their relations are so anxious to acknowledge them—I couldn't growl. The elder lady, who was, like her daughter, buried in furs, spoke. I took the young lady to be her daughter.

"'You'd better jump in and come right away back with us to dinner. Finch is out. Won't be back till late. But you must wait to see him. He'll be so glad you're here.'

'I did as I was bid, and pulled half the rug that the girl handed me over my knees. While I was doing so, however, I took my lustiest affidavit that I would on no account wait for Finch. He would have to get over his grief at not seeing me, as best he could. During the evening I would offer up short prayers frequently, that he might break his leg, tumble down an area, make away with himself, do anything in fact, but come back. The bare idea of that, caused me a sensation as though my back were being tickled with a feather. The game stood thus then. I was Uncle Abe, and I was going to dine with my sister, or sister-in-law, or niece, or some one. Any way, their name was Finch. I must gain as much information as possible. I must pump, and pump devilish hard. About as briskly as I should have done had I been at sea in a sinking craft. Only this kind of pumping required brains. I settled myself to the work. I pulled down my shirt collar, which pressed on my throat as though it were no collar at all, but just a clove hitch, with all hands singing a shanty on one end, with the other made fast to the winch. One thought troubled me immensely: I couldn't speak like an American. I didn't know whether I was supposed to be one, but I judged so. I decided, however, to guess judiciously through my nose, to make good use of my ears, *to pray constantly that Finch might not come*, and to trust to luck. The girl did most of the talking. How I blessed her. She was very pretty, and I settled with myself that if she were anxious to kiss me, she might. She rattled on about balls, theatres, dresses, a tooth that she had had filled with gold, a certain shop where the best candy in New York could be bought, &c. I let her go on. I liked it. I leant back in the carriage with the air of an Emperor—I—I mean with the beneficent, pleased, and slightly condescending manner of an uncle of importance. As long as she talked about her doings, and anything that concerned the family, I didn't mind; I was happy; but the moment the conversation bordered on the personal, Lord! how dry I got in the mouth. I felt as though I'd never had a drink in my life. I forgot Finch, and sighed for a B. and S.

"'Isn't he looking well, ma?'

"'Very, a little stouter, though, I think.'

"I gasped, but braced myself up.

"'Yes, I have put on flesh of late,' I observed. Then I affected a knowing look, nudged Mamma Finch familiarly, and said in an under-tone, though not low enough to escape the young lady's ears:

"'Hasn't she grown?'

"'What, Amy?'

"'Yes.'

"'Do you think so?'

"'Of course I do.'

"'Oh, you old dear. Do you really think I have? So glad; I want to be tall. But you haven't seen me yet. Wait till I stand up; then you shall inspect me.'

"I expressed my delight at the arrangement.

"'And how did you leave them all in Ohio?' was the next question.

"'First rate.'

"'When did you start?'

"I thought a minute. This was a puzzler. Didn't know how long it took to come, nor what part I was supposed to live in. Deafness was clearly my move.

"'I got here this morning.'

"'Oh, Finch 'll be so delighted when he finds you've come.'

"I thought very likely, but I said nothing. The carriage stopped.

"'Here we are at last,' exclaimed Amy. That Christian name has lived in my memory ever since.

"'Amy, *my* dear. Remember you're no longer a child. Let your uncle help you out of the carriage.'

"But Amy was gone. She tore up a big flight of steps, about three at a time, and a gas lamp being handy, I caught sight of a pair of ankles that would have turned the head of an anchorite. It immediately occurred to me, that I should be strong in the inspecting line when it came off. No sooner had the door closed than Amy threw her arms round me and kissed me as though I were dearer to her than any one else in the world. Then she held me off at arm's length and took a good look at me, and I let her, without attempting to avoid her gaze, for I gained confidence every minute.

"'But you've changed in some way. I can't make it out,' she exclaimed. 'How long is it since you were here?'

"I resolved that she should answer that trying question herself, so I said:

"'Now just tell *me*. Pay me the compliment of letting me see that you remember.'

"'Let me think. I've got the candy box you brought. I guess it's two years last fall.'

"'Bravo, so it is. And you've not forgotten Uncle Abe after all that while.'

"'There, there, Amy, do let your uncle alone. He hasn't had time to say a word.'

"I passed my arms round that slim waist. I drew Amy towards me, and I stole one long, long kiss. I suppose I must have betrayed a lot of feeling in that kiss, for the girl blushed as I held her, and as I did so, I said to myself: 'George Evans, if Finch comes in and blows your brains out, right away, you can consider yourself a lucky fellow. There isn't a man in the State of New York who wouldn't be proud to change places with you.' I didn't mean in standing to be shot at, mind. Mamma Finch put an end to my sentimentality, and I had to stop squeezing the dear girl.

"'There, Amy dear, we shall never induce your uncle to come near us again if you tease him so. You know which is your old room, dear,' she added, addressing me. I was 'dear' to her now. I was getting on nicely. But whose dear was I, or rather, why did she call me dear? Was I *her* brother or Finch's? I could not make up my mind on this score, so resolved to shape an even course between the two, allowing a trifle for variation and leeway. The reference to my old room was awkward, but I soon squashed that. Amy's kisses had nerved me, and the prospect of more of them, had such an effect, that rather than have foregone one of the dear pouting things, I would have faced Goliath of Gath himself in one of his most dangerous moods.

"'Show me my room, Amy, there's a good girl. I shall consider it such a compliment. My memory is treacherous, and I might make for the wrong door. I guess I remember now, though,' I added, as she tripped upstairs in front of me, looking as pretty as a picture; her cheeks rosy with the keen air, and her eyes—which from her fair complexion I judged must be blue

or grey—sparkling in the lamp-light like black diamonds. Before I got to the top of that staircase, sir, I was knocked all of a heap. I never could make out whether it was the eyes, or the figure, or the ankles, or the whole lot put together that so affected my susceptible and innocent heart; but what I do know is, that when we three sat down to dinner, Mamma Finch, Amy and myself, I was bad, terrible bad. I'd got as far as thinking that if Amy and I were together, *anywhere, anyhow*, but together, we could be happy on bread and cheese; at least, *I could*. So I wasn't long in coming to that way of thinking, you can bet, for an hour before I had no idea she existed. I was beginning to feel pretty comfortable by this time, for they'd both had a chance of detecting any irregularities about my figure-head; but Amy gave me a nasty twinge, and nearly spoilt my appetite, by staring at me sweetly, and then turning to her mother and remarking:

"‘I guess I've found out what's the matter, ma.’

"‘Anything wrong?’ I gasped, for I was taken by surprise.

"‘He's grown a beard, ma.’

"‘Yes, so he has.’

"‘I was relieved.

"‘I took to it about a year ago,’ I said. ‘Delicate throat. Was a martyr, in fact. Doctor advised me not to shave.’

"‘Dear, dear, but you never told us in your letters.’

"‘No. I didn't want to worry you. I like to write cheerfully.’

"‘How considerate.’

"‘How kind. Nothing serious, was it, uncle?’

"‘No, dear, nothing serious. But I required care.’

"‘Poor dear, yes. But why didn't you come to us to be nursed? The change would have done you good.’

"‘Well, I've a notion that a sick man's a nuisance.’

"‘Oh, nonsense—you mustn't say such a thing. Just come right away next time and see if you don't get a welcome.’

"‘Yes, see if you don't. Promise to come, uncle. Promise right away.’

"‘I promise with all my heart, my dear, and we'll ratify the treaty after dinner with a kiss.’

"‘That's a bargain.’

"‘Agreed.’

"‘And then we'll have the news.’

"Yes, then we'll have the news. We're dying to hear about Lucy and Maria, how George is getting on, and what's become of Bob. Then there's the mine."

"Yes, you must tell us all about the mine."

"Won't get a chance to look around till he's told us just everything, will he, ma?"

"Anything else you'd like to be told about? Because, you've only to ask, I thought to myself, and I went on thinking for some time, just running things over in my mind, and the end of it was that I said to myself, 'George, it's getting warm; it's getting hot; fact, you may consider it's getting d——d hot. I shouldn't be surprised, George, if, with all those questions to answer, you don't find yourself in a hole about as big as the bottomless pit. However, you'll get yourself out square enough if Finch don't turn up.' I went on praying about Finch. I'm of opinion I never prayed as hard. Whilst I was under weigh with the supplicating part of the business, we moved off into the drawing-room all together, for I couldn't very well be left alone. No sooner had we got there than my troubles began. Praying was no good. I hadn't time. From the moment I entered that room I forgot to satisfy myself as to whether Amy had grown. I forgot her pretty face and the kisses; the castles I'd built of a love of a cottage somewhere with her, were all forgotten too. I was like a man-o'-war with a lot of swift and heavily-armed gunboats round her, and Amy fired the first shot."

"Say, uncle, about the mine, now. Is it paying any?"

"Splendidly."

"Splendidly. But why don't I get any money then?"

"Yes, Abe, Finch is real anxious about that money. You'll have to talk to him."

"Of course, I will. I'll explain how matters stand."

"Yes, but I guess we ought to have got a dividend, if it was only a small one, long ago, and you say paying "splendidly." I can't make that out."

"Seems curious; but I'll let you know."

"Yes; but something's wrong."

"Evidently, but I'll fix it with the solicitors."

"Oh, well, you know, Abe, this is serious. Amy's money must be looked after, and we thought you were so smart."

"So I am. Give me half a chance, and you'll see."

"Well, you and Finch can fix it between you; that's best way. Only I guess he'll want to know straight how matters stand."

"So he shall."

"But *you* don't. Least, you don't appear to. What about the new farm; does it take you long to get to it?"

"Train's quite handy."

"Train. Didn't know there was one."

"It's a new line."

"Train. But—well, I never. Wonders 'll never cease."

"No, couple of thousand miles of railway nothing now-a-days."

"Well, that's true. But what about Maria? She's never been the same since the fever."

"Never, but she's picking up again. Good constitution."

"Good constitution! Why, she's been ill all her life."

"I know; but she's taken a turn."

"Strange, at her time of life, and after all she's gone through."

"So it is, but doctor's of opinion that it's only a question of time."

"Time. Hum, she'd better look sharp, then. Why, I guess she's seventy."

"Near upon that if she's a day."

"And Lucy, dear Lucy, how pleased we were to see her. Weren't we, Amy?" That bewilderingly beautiful Hebe nodded, showing her gold-studded tooth, which she seemed uncommon proud of, and her mother continued. I had long since consigned her to the bottom of a deep well, or the bed of the sea. I was in hopes that lockjaw would set in, or something. Yes, I longed for that something about as vigorously as the great Napoleon desired the coming of night or the advent of his allies. 'If wishes were horses, beggars might ride,' but they don't happen to be. Napoleon wished till he must have been about pea green with the effort, and that was my case; but, as with him, I hadn't my way, and Mamma Finch went on:

"Yes, I assure you, when Lucy left, we shed tears. She was like a ray of sunlight. You must miss her, I'm sure. And when does it come off, Abe?"

"Oh, I guess in about a year."

"I hadn't spoken a second before I saw I'd put my foot in it."

"About a year!" exclaimed Mamma Finch.

"'About a year!' re-echoed Amy.

"'Amy, my dear, you were not supposed to be listening. Run away. Abe, you must have taken leave of your senses.'

"'Oh—er—well, so would you if you'd been banged about in a train all day. Fact is, I'm tired, and I'll just go right away back to my hotel and turn in.'

"'I thought that card about the smartest one I'd played, and I've reason to think so still, but I was doomed to be landed, and I was.

"'So soon, Abe? I guess Finch 'll be here in no time. He said he wouldn't be late.'

"'I made for the door.

"'I'll see him in the morning,' I said, smiling blandly. 'Played out to-night. Tired as a dog. Guess I'll be round to-morrow early.'

"'But you haven't told us a word about Bee,' put in Amy, who had never left the room.

"'Oh, B.' (I thought she was speaking of some fellow confidentially or familiarly); 'I guess he'll keep till the morning. Come round and tell you the whole pile of news about him *then*.'

"'Him. Abe, you're——'

"'Ma, uncle's——'

"'Both women stopped short, but it was only to listen, and you can bet they hadn't to in vain.

"'It's Finch.'

"'It's pa.'

"'Knew he wouldn't be late.'

"'A latch-key rattled in the door. Amy heard it, and flew.

"'Pa, here's Uncle Abe. He says he's tired, and was just going. Let me help you off with your coat.'

"'The sound of kisses and a heavy step followed.

"'It gave me the creeps did that sound. Being tickled in the small of the back with a feather's nothing to it.

"'May the Lord look sideways on Finch,' was my most powerful inward upheaval. Silent but forcible, if not poetic. But it did not stop him. A huge form filled the doorway, and a voice said:

"'Guess I'm about as pleased to see you, Abe, as—— By thunder! it ain't Abe.'

"'Not—not Abe, Finch?'

"'Not uncle, pa? Oh, nonsense. Why, he's kissed me and——'

"'Kissed you! By thunder! he has, has he? Jeehoshaphat! kissed you, has he?'

"Out came a revolver.

"'Murder!' screamed Amy.

"'It must be Uncle Abe,' shrieked her mother, whose belief in her own eyesight was not to be shaken.

"'I tell you it ain't. It's like him, but it ain't. You two clear out. He's insulted me, and we'll settle up. Stranger, you can pray. You're doomed.'

"'Am I?' says I. 'I don't feel like it. I'll own to the fact that I've insulted you, and if you're willing to put that thing down, I'll give you as much satisfaction as you can wish for, in true British style, and if you're a man you'll chuck that bit of steel aside, and set to, and though I'm in the wrong I'll show you I'm worth a whole army of dead men. What do you say?'

"'That'

"I ducked like lightning, and a bullet whizzed past my head. I gave a screech and slipped in one above his waist belt in the fashion I'd told him of. Over he went and out I cleared. The latch of the door was near doing for me, though, for he picked himself up and rushed after me. Bang went another shot and I banged out of that house, and down the steps, and banged along the street too, in a style I'd no idea I could fetch. The sight of that six-shooter had acted like a charm. It had started me running, and for about a solid half-hour I forgot to stop. How I'd come right, I never could think, and if I'd had the offer of being made President to explain, I couldn't have done so; but I fetched up within ten yards of the ferry and I drew breath when we'd cleared the wharf, and not before. As soon as we were off, almost, I felt a smack on my shoulder. Oh, Lord, I thought, it's all up this time. One of the blue-coated gentlemen for certain. I didn't turn, I couldn't bear the sight, so I just said:

"'Yes, that's me. George Evans. Sorry to meet you, though. I'll go easy. No fuss,' and I just stood like a post.

"'Begorra, it *is* him. George, old boy.'

"I turned round and I was gripped by Pat Murphy, my oldest chum, and we hadn't met for years.

"'You're bleeding like a pig, man. Come out o' the light. George, you've been up to some divilment.'

" ' You'll see me through, Pat.' "

" ' By the blood o' the Murphys, I'll do that same.' "

" If I was near crying in my life it was at that moment. Pat pulled me gently on one side into the darkness, and out of the way of the people, for there was a crowd going over. Well, you see, I'd been on what you may call my beam ends, sir, when I landed in New York and grubbed at Sam's. *Then* I was in luck's way, for Amy was about the sweetest thing I've ever kissed. Then came the fire-eating gentleman, who wasn't disposed to give me a chance, which was a drop in my luck. And last, came the run and the meeting with Pat. But for the whole adventure the chances are I should never have crossed in that boat and, consequently, never have met Pat, in which case I should not have been here, as I'll explain. Now I think I've given an account of a pretty good string of vicissitudes, which ended favourably for me when I met Pat. You see Pat was a kind of boss around Brooklyn and those parts, and he just took me to his house, patched me up, for this bit of my ear was carried away, and started me off again with a new rig-out in the shape of money and a couple of introductions to London firms. One thing led to another, and I can date back to those introductions helping me aboard of this ship. It was a near thing, for if that Yankee's bullet had been an inch closer to my head I shouldn't have been here, and you can bet the part of Uncle Abe, which looked rosy enough at the start off, won't be played again by me in a hurry. There's eight bells, sir, and the watch are aft. Hope I haven't worried you with my yarn, but you led up to it and I had it on my mind. Good night, sir ; I'll make a shape at turning in."

" Good night, Evans."

I had walked the poop for the best part of that watch, and after Evans had left I laughed till I was tired, at the clever way in which he had excited my interest and kept me pacing at his side, and then I followed his example, leaving the second mate in charge of the deck.

In a Norwegian Valley.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

Author of "A CRACK COUNTY," "THAT PRETTY LITTLE HORSEBREAKER,"
&c.

KRISTIAN ANDERSEN was only a poor fisherman. All his days he had lived in a remote Norwegian valley, hemmed in by towering mountains, on which, summer and winter, the snow never melted. He built himself a little wooden hut, and thatched it with the bark of the birch tree, which he covered with moss. Then he proceeded to roll away the big stones that surrounded his cottage on every side, and with great toil and trouble finally succeeded in clearing a diminutive plot of ground. Here he sowed a few handfuls of wheat and some potatoes.

Though narrow, the valley was very beautiful, and a fine river ran down it from the mountains to the Fjord. In the autumn the salmon lay so thick in the pools that one could count them as one walked along the banks. Every peasant proprietor and small farmer living close at hand had from time immemorial possessed the right of netting the river, and many a fine fat fish Kristian caught in this manner. When he took one of any size he salted it for the winter, and so, by hook and by crook, he and his wife and five flaxen-haired little ones managed to subsist. But it was often a hard struggle, for they were very poor, and the beauty of the children was spoilt by the starved, almost wolfish expression of their thin, pinched faces. They carried themselves straitly and sturdily, like true mountaineers, but their bodies were lean and ill-nourished. Kristian himself was a tall, finely-made man, but his frame wanted filling out, and he bore a curious resemblance to a hungry greyhound. Often half-starved, always thinly clothed, and exposed to the heat of the summer sun and the cold blasts of the chill wintry weather, these seven persons lived. The mother washed, cooked, fetched water from the river in a heavy bucket, toiled in the fields, bore numerous children, and at thirty looked already an old woman. The little ones played about the cottage door, clad in picturesque tatters,

whilst their fair, rough heads became bleached white by the sun. And Kristian gained a livelihood by cutting down trees, by building boats, selling firewood, and occasionally making boots. He was a kind of universal genius, who, in a rough and ready way, could turn his hand to anything. So the days passed, without any of the luxuries and superfluities which in England not only render life enjoyable but are there considered almost indispensable to existence. With Kristian and his wife the object was to exist—to keep body and soul together. The simple couple asked for nothing more. They had been brought up in poverty, and if not content, at all events were accustomed to hardship. Then, too, they had fresh air and space, neighbours who were no better off than themselves, and their own beautiful valley to look at whenever they felt inclined. Yes, people might fare worse.

After some years there came a talk of a rich Englishman taking the river on a long lease. Upon this, all the different proprietors met together, and consulted at length. Finally, it was agreed that they would sell their rights of netting and trapping salmon for the sum of three thousand kroner, or about a hundred and sixty pounds of our English money. The rent was a good one, and the owners of the river considered they had done a rare stroke of business when, without further bargaining, the Englishman complied with their demands. Only Kristian regretted the transaction, for he had been a very successful fisherman, and knew how to fish with a rod after the foreign fashion. But to compensate him for the salmon which he could now no longer catch, he was appointed gaffer at the fixed sum of two kroner, or two shillings and threepence a day. And with two shillings and threepence coming in regularly for two, or perhaps three months, Kristian thought himself a rich man. So he, too, was satisfied with the bargain, and felt prepared to welcome the stranger. Kristian fully deserved the post of gaffer, for it was generally admitted that no one knew the river so well as he, or could manage a boat with such dexterity; moreover, his cottage overlooked the "Fos" or Waterfall pool, where the finest sport was usually obtained. For the salmon could not leap the foaming heights of the "Fos," consequently they accumulated in vast numbers beneath the deep backwaters formed by the tempestuous current as it came rumbling down over a jutting ledge of huge grey boulders. The spray rose high in the air, moistening the

silvery stems and fluttering foliage of the birch trees growing near ; and in summer, when the sun shone, a brilliant rainbow spanned the feathery mass of falling water, and irradiated it with gay prismatic colours. It was a lovely spot, and Kristian loved it well.

From his boyhood upward he had watched the vain efforts of the shining salmon to overleap the "Fos." The sound of its dull, thunderous roar was as sweet music in his ears. He knew every stone, every eddy in the river by heart, and the sight of the snow-clad hills, standing out clear and sharp against the quiet evening sky, turning from grey to purple, from purple to black, filled his soul with indescribable serenity, and affected his simple nature more than the finest church service. At the time of which we are speaking he was thirty-five years of age, and he had never once travelled beyond his native valley. He could conceive of other spots, but of none so fair, so peaceful and home-like.

The winter snows had melted, the earth was clothed in green, the birches were shaking out their pretty round leaves, and the silver-scaled fish were rushing up from the Fjord every day. In the first week of June Sir Patrick Ryan arrived from England, with an English servant, and a vast amount of luggage. From the moment they went out fishing together, Kristian entertained for his new employer an intense and genuine admiration. Judging from the Norwegian's point of view, Sir Patrick had indeed much to recommend him. He cast a splendid line, was a thorough sportsman, wore good clothes, and last, but by no means least, was the undoubted possessor of '*mange penge*' (much money).

And while Sir Patrick fished from the bank, and Kristian sat crouched behind him—a motionless figure who might have been cut out of stone, save for the pair of hawk-like grey eyes, which, shining above his fair, curly beard, were gravely fixed on the water—a great many strange, new thoughts disturbed the honest fellow's simple brain. He pondered over problems which hitherto had not presented themselves to his consideration, and asked himself why he should have to work hard from five in the morning until twelve at night, when the Englishman spent all his time on amusement. He, too, would have liked to have done the same—to fish the river with a fine new rod, and have a man at his back to carry all his things, and help him in every emergency. Sir

Patrick had a good waterproof coat to put on whenever it rained, whilst he, Kristian, in his ragged red shirt got wet to the skin. *He* sat and shivered, whilst the other was warm and dry. *He* never had more than two meals a day, and often felt quite faint from hunger, whilst this fortunate foreigner could eat as much as ever he chose. Why were these things allowed by God? Why did such cruel inequalities exist between man and man? Were they not all of the same flesh and blood? Kristian felt sorely puzzled.

When he gazed at Sir Patrick's well-nourished frame, at his muscular limbs and broad shoulders, and contrasted them with his own, he could not smother a certain sense of injury. They were of about the same height and shape, but how different were their lots! The one man had so much, the other so little. Sir Patrick lived for pleasure, and he for toil, and yet he felt deeply that he could have appreciated the pleasure very keenly had it fallen to his share. He was a toiler from necessity, not choice. He would have liked to see his children fat and round, and to put them in the way of making money. Money! Ah! that was it. Money counted for everything in this world. Without it one was very little better than a beast of burden. But here in Norway there was no chance of getting rich. It was such a poor land. Generation after generation lived on the same wretched little plot of ground, and son followed father to the grave.

Thus Kristian mused discontentedly enough, for after all, what had he to content him?

But by-and-by he grew ashamed of his envious thoughts, for as he came to know the Englishman better, he learnt to love him with a very real and true affection. In process of time he regarded Sir Patrick as a superior being not to be compared with himself. He knew so much, and had so many accomplishments. But what won Kristian's heart more than anything was the baronet's unvarying kindness. Poor fellow! he was not used to gentle treatment. When Sir Patrick stuffed his pockets full of sweets, and distributed their contents to the little ones, or else presented him with a stick of tobacco to chew, it touched him to the quick. He could scarcely express his thanks for emotion. A close friendship sprang up between the handsome young Englishman, born with a golden spoon in his mouth, and the simple peasant, to whose share so few of the good things of this life had fallen.

When sport was bad, as frequently proved the case in the fine summer weather, Sir Patrick in his broken Norwegian would tell Kristian of England, and what a flourishing country it was, how the horses were quite big, and very fast, and the fields stretched for miles, bounded by hedges, and how comparatively there were but few rivers and mountains. Kristian listened open-mouthed to such wonders as these. His employer's talk seemed to open out a new world to the honest, ignorant fellow who, nevertheless, was not devoid of intelligence.

It was a very bright, hot season. There came a period of protracted drought, during which the salmon refused to take. Day after day Sir Patrick flogged the various pools without any result. His fly floated beautifully down on the clear, green water, but not a fish would look at it. Kristian tried all sorts of places, and made so many excuses for his beloved river, that at last he was at his wit's end to invent any more. At length, in despair, he bethought him of a small pool very seldom fished, on account of the difficulty in reaching it. It could only be approached by shooting some dangerous rapids. Kristian was said to be the single fisherman in the whole place who knew how to guide a boat safely over them, and he had learnt the secret from his father when still a mere boy.

Confined between two high banks, the stream at this point rushed down for about a couple of hundred yards with fearful rapidity. Just at the narrowest part, it curled over into three or four great waves, which broke up into a seething whirlpool. The natives regarded it with awe and superstition, for tradition said that two human lives had been destroyed by its treacherous powers of suction. Beyond this whirlpool lay a seemingly quiet backwater, on either side of which the stream, dividing, flowed swiftly on. Just when the boat began to get rocked by the big waves, it was necessary to pull for sheer life, in order to avoid the eddy in the midst of which stood a sunken rock, and gain the backwater. When the river was low, the rapids were even more difficult to shoot than in seasons of flood, for the danger of striking against some sharp stone was greatly enhanced. Knowing this, for a long time past Kristian had not attempted to fish the pool. But one night, when things had been going even worse than usual, Sir Patrick suddenly said, "Kristian, it is ages since we went to the Svora Hul. What do you say to our trying

it this evening? There is always an off chance of hooking a good fish in that backwater."

Kristian shook his head.

"I am afraid the river is too low," he said. "The boat cannot go safely."

Sir Patrick shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"Oh! never mind, we'll chance it. Where there's a will there's a way."

Although he doubted the wisdom of his master's decision, Kristian made no further remonstrance, so they got into the boat, and he tied the oars on firmly with two bits of old rope. The boat was a regular cockle-shell. Her planks were not half an inch thick, and she leaked so badly that every ten minutes she required baling out with an old tin pot used for the purpose. When the two big men were seated, her gunwales were not half a foot above the water, and she looked an uncommonly frail craft in which to brave the rushing torrent. Immediately they pushed off from the shore the current caught her broadside on and whirled her along at railroad speed. Banks, boulders, trees, seemed to fly past them. Dozens of white-crested wavelets splashed angrily beneath the boat's bow and, jumping up, half filled her with water. Kristian sat motionless, a hand on either oar, his keen eye fixed steadily on the rushing stream. When Sir Patrick made some laughing observation, he vouchsafed but a monosyllabic reply. His faculties were absorbed, and he neither could nor would allow them to be diverted. Occasionally he dipped an oar, and slightly altered the boat's course.

On, on they raced, until it seemed as if nothing could stop them in their mad career. The excitement was intense. Sir Patrick laughed out loud. He was five-and-twenty, had an adventurous nature, which delighted in a touch of danger, and nerves that had never been subjected to any very great ordeal and were consequently thoroughly sound and healthy.

All at once, the boat began to toss violently, and seemed on the point of capsizing. She was nearing the eddy, and the first of the big waves had caught her. Two or three times she bumped against the bottom, for although the pool itself was deep, the water here was shallow. Suddenly Kristian set to work to row, as if for his life. One moment his back was bent double, the next he leant far back, with strained muscles, and

straight extended legs. His face grew red with exertion, and the veins on his forehead became swollen and purple. A dozen vigorous strokes up stream altered the boat's course, at the instant when the eddy threatened to sweep her round and round, and saved her from her perilous position. She gained the backwater, and floated quietly on its smooth surface, whilst the foaming current glided swiftly by on either side. The edges of the stream were much patronized by salmon and the Svora Hul—as it was called—was notorious for very big fish.

"Bravo," cried Sir Patrick, as Kristian, leaning forward, mopped his moist brow with the sleeve of his faded red shirt. "I knew we could do it, if we tried. Here, take a pull." And he handed him his flask.

They now settled down steadily to fishing, and neither of them spoke a word. Again and again the baronet cast his Jock Scott in the most artistic manner, and with admirable patience. But the wily fish were not to be tempted from their haunts. Once he fancied he saw the nose of one within a few inches of the fly; for ten minutes he flogged perseveringly over the spot, but the cunning salmon would not come again even for a shy inspection. Sir Patrick began to give up hope, especially as there were only a few casts left. The sun had sunk to rest by now, and twilight was rapidly stealing over the narrow valley. The rounded outlines of the great bald hills stood out black against a clear daffodil sky. The head of the pool reflected the last rosy flush of sunset, but its tail was in complete shadow. The sombre reflection of an enormous mountain rendered it dark as night, and the surface of the water resembled a polished agate. Sir Patrick's fly, falling lightly, scarcely made a ripple on the smooth, gliding stream. Suddenly by the fast fading light, he saw a huge boil. The next moment his line tautened, the tip of his rod was bent downwards, and whirr-whirr went the welcome click of a rapidly vanishing reel.

"Stor Lax (big salmon)," sang out Kristian, in tones of unqualified delight.

And indeed he seemed right, for the fish when he felt himself hooked, made such a tremendous rush down stream, that they were forced to leave the pool and pursue him as fast as they could. When at length he checked, he gave a sullen dive, and sulked at the bottom of the river, hanging all the time like a

lump of lead on Sir Patrick's arms. In order better to play his captive, that gentleman jumped on shore directly the opportunity presented itself, and Kristian followed his example. For ten, twenty, thirty minutes the fish remained immovable. It was getting monotonous, and Kristian tried to liven him up by throwing stones at him. Meanwhile, Sir Patrick kept a steady strain upon the salmon. His arms and back ached to such an extent that he felt convinced the victim was of no ordinary dimensions. At last the fish once more began to show signs of life; he jerked repeatedly at the line, first with a fluttering, uncertain motion, then angrily and heavily.

This was an anxious time for Sir Patrick, who feared every moment that his captive would free himself of the obnoxious hook. Luckily it held firm, and the salmon, finding his tactics of no avail, headed steadily up stream; but the current was too strong for him to succeed in regaining the backwater, where he had spent such a pleasant, lazy summer; half choked, he turned tail, and went off again down stream at a great rate. Sir Patrick ran along the stony bank in pursuit; his reel was well nigh exhausted, and spinning fast. That was a race! For nearly half a mile the fish always had the best of it, and the angler and his trusty attendant panted for breath. The excitement was so intense, that it almost degenerated into pain. Kristian and Sir Patrick experienced an immense relief, when at length the prize pulled up in a wide pool, and took to sulking again. But his forces were beginning to fail him, though he had recourse to other means of resistance. Backwards and forwards he rushed in a state of fierce irritation and fear; but each rush waxed feebler than its predecessor. At this juncture, Kristian, gaff in hand, entered knee-deep into the water, and crouching, watched his opportunity. Nevertheless, it did not come just yet. The salmon continued to struggle desperately, and until now, had never once shown himself. Little by little, however, as he became exhausted, he was drawn nearer to the surface of the water, until at last he lay revealed in all his shining length.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sir Patrick, his face flushing red with elation. "He's a big 'un, and no mistake; take care, Kristian, take care. I would not lose him for a hundred golden sovereigns."

Kristian's eagerness to secure the prize was so great, that he

had advanced waist-high into the current, which threatened to sweep him off his legs. He was keen as mustard, and did not mind a wetting in such a cause ; besides, he had nothing to spoil. At length he got a chance, though not a good one ; but he was an expert gaffer, and with a thrust, quick as lightning, of his lean right arm, he impaled the monster fish. Out spurted the red blood, and a mighty splashing ensued, but the salmon's days were numbered and with some difficulty he was towed into shore. Straightway he was fallen upon by Kristian, who, seizing a big stone, belaboured him about the head until all the life was knocked out of him. He had evidently been up the river some time, and was long and black to look at ; nevertheless, master and man gazed at him with pride and admiration. The fly was firmly imbedded in the gristly jaw of the fish, and in order to extricate it, a knife had to be employed. Then Sir Patrick produced his weighing machine from his pocket. Thirty-six pounds and a quarter was the record. No wonder the angler felt satisfied with his evening's amusement. By this time it was too dark to fish any more, so Sir Patrick mounted into a comfortable carriol, which quickly conveyed him to his quarters, whilst Kristian, wet to the skin, and feeling the cold begin to pierce to his bones, trudged back to his wooden hut, there to find an insufficient meal provided, and go hungry but happy to bed.

When the next evening came, Sir Patrick was very keen to try the Svora Hul again. The sun had shone brightly and warmly during the day, whilst a strong north wind blew from the Fjord to the valley. In consequence, the river had fallen considerably since the previous afternoon Kristian looked dubious when Sir Patrick proposed that they should endeavour to repeat their luck in the same pool.

"Very little water," he said. "Not good for boat to go. Better fish somewhere else."

"What!" exclaimed Sir Patrick jestingly. "I thought you were made of better stuff. Surely, you are not afraid?"

Kristian flushed a dull red beneath his sun-burnt skin. He felt the taunt severely.

"No," he said shortly, "I am not afraid ; I am ready to go if you wish it."

"All right. By-the-by, Kristian, can you swim?"

"No ; I do not know how."

"Then I must save you and myself too, in case of an emergency." Sir Patrick spoke the words lightly, and without a thought.

Whereupon they seated themselves in the boat, and before long were tearing down the rapids, literally flying over the sunken boulders scattered along the river's bed. All at once the boat's keel struck sharply against a hidden stone, and nearly sent Kristian and Sir Patrick overboard. The former plied the oars with right good will, for the current was spinning the stern of their cockle-shell round and round, and as she had sprung a leak, the situation was anything but pleasant. As bad luck would have it, the right oar suddenly snapped like a twig beneath his grasp, the broken blade floating away before he could recover it. Kristian's exertions had set the boat free, and in less time than it takes to tell, she was borne towards the eddy. He rowed desperately with his one remaining oar, using it as a paddle, but the stream was too strong, and he could not make head against it. On, on they went at sickening speed. Even Sir Patrick appreciated the danger, and his fair, florid face turned a shade paler than usual. The big waves caught them—they were powerless to cross at the proper angle—and swept the boat right into the eddy. Crash! She struck the great rock in its midst, and collapsed like a nutshell beneath a pair of crackers. Her occupants were precipitated into the water. Sir Patrick felt himself being sucked down—down—down. He struck out wildly, and as he did so his fingers came in contact with some falling body, round which they closed instinctively. Chance had flung him against Kristian, who, he recollected, could not swim. He clutched firmly hold of the Norwegian, and then swam for dear life. But the eddy's horrible powers of suction prevented him from making any way. He became faint and exhausted. A kind of vertigo was descending upon his senses. He realized that if he gave in to it, it meant death, and continued to struggle fiercely. Then he became partially unconscious, but all the time he had a vague, uneasy sensation of being whirled along like a straw, bumped, tossed and bruised. When he came to himself he was lying in shallow water, with his head resting on a stone, his hand still grasping Kristian by the shirt. Slowly and painfully he regained the shore, dragging his companion after him.

Kristian's appearance frightened him. His eyes were closed, his mouth open, his face of a whitey-purple hue, whilst from the right temple issued a few great drops of blood. A deep cut disfigured it, probably inflicted by some pointed rock with which he must have come in contact. Sir Patrick knelt down on the ground in alarm.

"Kristian, my brave fellow," he said tremulously. "Oh, Kristian, speak to me!"

But no answer came to the appeal, and he went on in accents of bitter self-reproach:

"It was my folly which led us into this danger. I would not take your warning, and now if anything happens to you, I—I"—and his voice broke—"shall never forgive myself."

Alas! Kristian heard not. He lay rigid and motionless; his fair, hollow face turned up to the summer sky, and his fingernails buried in the palms of his hard, brown hands. Overcome by a horrible apprehension, Sir Patrick searched hurriedly in his pocket. Yes, thank goodness, his flask was there. He poured its contents down Kristian's throat. The strong English brandy produced a temporary effect. Kristian sighed; the lids of his grey eyes unclosed. The eyes themselves were no longer bright; they wore a dull, glazed look. A flickering colour stole to his cheek.

"Kristian," pleaded Sir Patrick with increased agitation, "for God's sake speak to me."

Kristian seemed to hear and recognize the well-known voice. A faint smile passed over his fleshless face. He sought to hold out his hand. Sir Patrick seized it, and held it in a warm pressure.

"That is much better," he cried cheerily. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"My wife—my children," murmured the dying man, speaking with difficulty. "T—take—care—of—them."

"Yes, yes, of course. But what nonsense you're talking, Kristian. You'll be able to look after them yourself, as usual."

Kristian turned his head uneasily.

"No. It—is—all—over—with me. Do—not—grieve." For the tears were standing in Sir Patrick's eyes. "I—I—am going—to—an—easier world—to live in, th—than—this."

"Oh! Kristian, I am so miserable. It is not true that you are



ALAS! KRISTIAN HEARD NOT.

To face page 60.

IN A NORWEGIAN VALLEY.
Lon. Soc. - Christmas No. 1891.

dying. I can't—I won't believe it." And Sir Patrick wrung his hands in despair. "Confound my cursed folly. Would to heaven I had taken your advice!"

"Do not bl-blame yourself. I—am—glad—to—go. I have of-often been very hungry and ve-very tired. Were it not for my wife and—little ones"—his breath was failing him rapidly—"th-there—is—nothing—in—this—world—to make me—wish—to—stay."

A wonderful smile illumined his countenance; for an instant a bright light lit up his sunken eyes. Then, with a fluttering sigh, he turned his head gently round, and spoke no more. . . . Sir Patrick's grief was intense. Remorse added to its poignancy. Death seemed to him a terrible and an awful thing. He could not think how any man could face it resignedly. The earth was so bright, so fair! He was too young, too wealthy and fortunate to realize that the conditions of life vary, and that from his birth to his end they had proved too hard for poor Kristian. The honest fisherman had passed from toil to rest—from labour to peace. What was there to regret? To quote his dying words, he had often been very tired and very hungry! The great All-Father had had compassion, and called his simple soul to a dwelling-place where hunger and fatigue are unknown.

The Kbitmatgar.

By B. M. CROKER,

Author of "PRETTY MISS NEVILLE," "A BIRD OF PASSAGE,"
"INTERFERENCE," "DIANA BARRINGTON," etc., etc.

PERHAPS you have seen them more than once on railway platforms in the North-West Provinces. A shabby, squalid, weary-looking group, sitting on their battered baggage, or scrambling in and out of intermediate compartments; I mean Jackson, the photographer, and his belongings. Jackson is not his real name, but it answers the purpose. There are people who will tell you that Jackson is a man of good family, that he once held a commission in a crack cavalry regiment, and that his brother is Lord-Lieutenant of his county, and his nieces are seen at Court balls. Then how comes their kinsman to have fallen to such low estate?—if kinsman he be—this seedy-looking, unshorn reprobate, with a collarless flannel shirt, greasy deerstalker, and broken tennis shoes. If you look into his face, who runs may read the answer—Jackson drinks; or his swollen features, inflamed nose and watery and uncertain eye, greatly belie him.

Jackson was a *mauvais sujet* from his youth upwards, if the truth must be confessed. At school he was always in trouble and in debt. At Oxford his scrapes were so prominent that he had more than one narrow escape of being sent down. Who would believe, to look at him *now*, that he had once been a very pretty boy, the youngest and best-looking of a handsome family, and naturally his mother's darling? Poor woman! whilst she lived she shielded him from duns and dons, and from his father's wrath—she pawned her diamonds and handed over her pin money to pay his bills, she gave him advice—and he gave her kisses. By the time he had joined his regiment, this reckless youth had lost his best friend, but his bad luck—as *he* termed it—still clung to him and overwhelmed him. His father had a serious interview with his colonel, paid up like a liberal parent and agreed to his son's exchange into a corps in India. "India may steady him," thought this sanguine old gentleman, but alas!

it had anything but the desired effect. In India the prodigal became more imprudent than ever. Cards, racing, simpkin, soon swallowed up his moderate allowance, and he fell headlong into the hands of the soucars, a truly fatal fall! Twenty per cent. per month makes horrible ravages in the income of a subaltern, and soon he was hopelessly entangled in debt, and had acquired the disagreeable reputation of being "A man who never paid for anything, and always let others in, when it was a question of rupees." Then his name was whispered in connection with some very shabby racing transaction, and finally he was obliged to leave the service, bankrupt alike in honour and credit. His father was dead, his brothers unanimously disowned him, and for twenty years he fell from one grade to another, as he roamed over India from Peshawar to Madras and Rangoon to Bombay. He had been in turn planter, then planter's clerk, house agent, tonga agent; he had tried touting for a tailoring firm and manufacturing hill jams, and here he was at fifty years of age, with a half-caste wife, a couple of dusky children, and scarcely an anna in his pocket. Undoubtedly he had put the coping stone on his misfortunes when he took for his bride the pretty, slatternly daughter of a piano tuner, a girl without education, without energy—and without a penny.

Ten years ago Fernanda Braganza had been a charming creature (with the fleeting beauty of her kind), a sylph in form, with superb dark eyes, fairy-like feet, and a pronounced taste for pink ribbons, patchouli and pearl powder. This vision of beauty, who had gushed to Jackson with her soul in her exquisite eyes, and who was not insensible to the honour of marrying a gentleman, was she the self-same individual as this great fat woman, in carpet slippers, and a bulging tweed ulster, who stood with a sallow, hungry-looking child in either hand? Alas! she was.

The Jacksons had come to try their fortunes at Panipore—a small up-country station, where there were two European regiments and half a Battery of Artillery—for is not Tommy Atkins ever a generous patron to an inexpensive photographer? The finances of the family were at a very low ebb that February afternoon, as they stood on the platform collecting their belongings, a camera and chemicals, a roll of frowsy bedding, a few cooking things, a couple of boxes, also a couple of grimy servants—in India, the poorest have a following, and third-class

tickets are cheap. Jackson had a "three finger" peg at the bar, although there was but little in his pocket, besides a few cards and paper posters, and thus invigorated proceeded to take steps respecting the removal of his family.

Poverty forbade their transit in a couple of ticca gharries, and pride shrank from an ekka, therefore Jackson left them in the waiting-room whilst he tramped away in the blinding sun and powdery white dust, to see if there was accommodation at the Dāk Bungalow; it proved to be crammed, and he had not yet come down to the Serai, or native halting-place. He was (when sober) a man of some resource. He made his way up to the barracks and asked questions, and heard that the station was in the same condition as the Dāk Bungalow, quite full, even Fever Hall and Cholera Villa were occupied, and the only shelter he could put his head into, was the big two-storied bungalow in the Paiwene road—it had been empty for years; it was to be had at a nominal rent—say two rupees a week—and there was no fear of any one disturbing him *there!* It was large and close to the barracks, but greatly out of repair. With this useful intelligence, Mr. Jackson rejoined his impatient circle and with their goods in a hand-cart, they started off for this house of refuge without delay.

Past the native bazaar, past the officers' mess, past the church, then along a straight wide road, where the crisp dead leaves crackled under foot, a road lined with dusty half bare trees; whose branches stood out in strong relief against a hard blue sky, whilst a vast tract of grain country, covered with green barley and ripe sugar cane, stretched away on the right. On the left were a pair of great gaunt gate piers, leading by a grass-grown approach, to the two-storied bungalow, an imposing looking house, that was situated well back from the highway amid a wilderness of trees, and rank and rotting vegetation. Distance in this case certainly had lent enchantment to the view! When the little party arrived under the wide, dilapidated portico, they found all the doors closed, the lower windows stuffed with boards, matting and even paper in default of glass; weeds and creepers abounded, and there was a dangerous fissure in the front wall. After knocking and calling for about ten minutes, an ancient chowkidar appeared looking half asleep. At first he thought it was merely a party from the station, wishing as was their

eccentric custom, "to go over" the haunted house, the Bhootia Bungalow, but he soon learnt his mistake, from the voluble, shrill-tongued mem-sahib.

This family of shabby Europeans, who had arrived on foot, with all their belongings in a "*tailer*" from the station, had actually come to stay, to sleep, to *live* on the premises! Grumbling to himself, he conducted them up an exceedingly rickety, not to say dangerous staircase, for the lower rooms were dark and damp, to three or four large and cheerful apartments, opening on a fine verandah. Mrs. Jackson was accustomed to pitching her tent in queer places and in a very short time she had procured from the bazaar a table, a few chairs and a couple of charpoys, and furnished two rooms; she had but little to unpack, whilst Kadir Bux, the family slave, vibrated between cooking and chemicals. Meanwhile Mr. Jackson, having washed, shaved, and invested himself in his one linen collar and black alpaca coat, set forth on a tour of inspection, to stick up posters and distribute cards. His wife also made her rounds; the upper rooms were habitable and the verandah commanded a fine view; it overlooked the park-like but neglected compound, intersected with short cut paths, and which, despite its two grand entrance gates, was now without hedge or paling, and quite open to the road, a road down which not a few ladies and gentlemen in bamboo carts or on ponies were trotting past for their evening airing. Below the suite Mr. Jackson had chosen, were the dismal vault-like rooms, the chowkidar with his charpoy and hukka, and beyond, at the back of the bungalow, the servants' quarters and stables, but roofless. Behind these ruins, stretched an immense overgrown garden (with ancient, dried-up fruit trees, faint traces of walks and water channels, and a broken fountain and sundial) now abandoned to cattle. On the whole Mrs. Jackson was pleased with her survey. She had never as yet inhabited such a lordly-looking mansion, and felt more contented than she had done for a long time, especially as Jackson was on his best behaviour—he had no friends in the place, and scarcely any funds.

In a short time Mr. Jackson had acquired both—his good address, his gentlemanly voice, and the whisper of his having once been an officer who had come to grief—who had been unfortunate—went far in a military station. With extraordinary discretion he kept his belongings entirely out of sight; he also

kept sober, and consequently received a number of orders for photographs of groups, of bungalows and of polo ponies. He had the eye of an artist and really knew his business, and although some were startled at the strength of the pegs which he accepted, he had a large and lucrative connection in less than no time and rupees came flowing in fast. As he and the invaluable Kadir worked together, he talked glibly to portly field officers, and smooth-faced subalterns, of men whom *he* had known, men whose names at least were familiar to them, distinguished veterans, smart soldiers and even celebrated personages. He attended church, and sang lustily out of a little old prayer-book and looked such a picture of devout, decayed gentility that the tender-hearted ladies pitied him and thought him quite romantic and hastened to order photographs of all their children or, children being lacking, dogs. Little did they know that Mr. Jackson's shabby prayer-book would have been sold for drink years previously, only that he found it an absolutely unmarketable article!

Meanwhile Mrs. Jackson was convinced that she was positively about to be "a lady at last." She purchased frocks for her fallow girls, a dress and boots for herself, she set up a rocking chair and a cook, and occasionally drove to the bazaar in a "ticca" gharry, where she looked down with splendid dignity on the busy bargaining wives of Tommy Atkins. The Chaplain's lady had called upon her, also the Barrack Sergeant's wife, who lived in a small bungalow or quarters beyond the garden. She had snubbed this good woman at first, but subsequently had thawed toward her for several reasons. Jackson, having been uproariously drunk, and unpleasantly familiar to an officer, had now fallen back on the sergeants' mess for his society and on private soldiers for his patrons. He was still doing a roaring trade, especially in cartes-de-visite at six rupees a dozen. He bragged and talked, and even wept, to his listeners in the barrack rooms, and to the canteen: listeners who thought him an uncommonly fine fellow, liberal as a lord, flinging his coin right and left. They little guessed the usual sequel or of how the Jackson family were wont to steal out of a station by rail in the grey dawn of an Indian morning, leaving many poor natives who had supplied their wants in the shape of bread, and meat, coffee, and even clothes, to bewail their too abrupt departure. Jackson was "on the drink," as his wife frankly expressed it, never home before twelve o'clock at night,

and then had to be helped upstairs, and Mrs. Jackson found these evenings very wearisome. She rarely read, but she did a little crochet and a great deal of scolding, and she slept a good deal, and as long as her coffee and her curry were well and punctually served she was fairly content, for she was naturally lethargic and indolent. But still she liked to *talk*, and here she had no one with whom to exchange a word. She pined for the sound of another female tongue, and accordingly one afternoon she arrayed herself in her new hat with scarlet cock's feathers, and her yellow silk gloves, and with the cook as a body-servant and to carry her umbrella, she sallied forth to return the visit of the Barrack Sergeant's wife. She had not far to go, only through the garden and across the road. The Barrack Sergeant's wife was knitting outside in her verandah, for the weather was "warming up," when Mrs. Jackson, all gorgeous in her best garments, loomed upon her vision. Now Mrs. Clark "had no notion of the wives of drunken photographers giving themselves hairs! And don't go for to tell *her* as ever that Jackson was a gentleman! A fellow that went reeling home from the canteen every night!" But she dissembled her feelings and stood up rather stiffly, and invited her visitor into her drawing-room, a small apartment, the walls coloured grey, furnished with cheap straw chairs, covered in gaudy cretonne, further embellished by billowy white curtains, tottering little tables and a quantity of photographs in cotton velvet frames, a room of some pretensions, and Mrs. Clark's pride. Its unexpected grandeur was a blow to Mrs. Jackson, as was also the appearance of two cups of tea on a tray, accompanied by a plate of four water biscuits. It seemed to her that Mrs. Clark also set up for being quite the lady, although *her* husband was not a gentleman. The two matrons talked volubly, as they sipped their tea, of bazaar prices, cheating hawkers, and the enormities of their servants. "My cook," was continually in Mrs. Jackson's mouth: they played a fine game of brag, in which Mrs. Jackson, despite her husband who had been an officer, of her cook, and of her large house, came off second best!

"I can't think," she said, looking round contemptuously, "how you can bear to like these stuffy quarters; I am sure *I* couldn't, it would kill me in a week. You should see the splendid rooms we have; they do say it was once a palace, and built by a nabob."

CHRIS.

"May be so," rejoined the other; "I know it was a mess house, and after that an officers' chummary, fifteen or twenty years ago, but no one would live there now, unless they had no other roof to cover them, and came to a place like a parcel of beggars."

"Why, what's up with it?" inquired Mrs. Jackson, suddenly becoming of a dusky puce, even through her pearl powder.

"Don't you know—and *you* there this two months and more?"

"Indeed I don't; what is there to know?"

"And haven't you seen him?" demanded Mrs. Clark in a key of intense surprise—"I mean the Khitmatgar?"

"I declare I don't know what you are talking about," cried the other peevishly. "What Khitmatgar?"

"What Khitmatgar? Hark at her! Why, a short, square-shouldered man in a smart blue coat, with a regimental badge in his turban. He has very sticking-out curling black whiskers, and a pair of wicked eyes that look as if they could stab you, though he salaams to the ground whenever you meet him."

"I believe I *have* seen him, now you mention it," rejoined Mrs. Jackson, "rather a tidy-looking servant, with, as you say, a bad expression. But bless you! *we* have such crowds of officers' messengers coming with chits to my husband, I never know who they are! I've seen him now and then, of an evening, I'm sure, though I don't know what brought him, or whose servant he is."

"Servant!" echoed the other, "why, he is a ghost, the ghost what haunts the bungalow!"

"Ah, now, Mrs. Clark," said her visitor patronizingly, "you don't tell me you believe such rubbish?"

"Rubbish!" indignantly, "is it? Oh, just you wait and see. Ask old Mr. Soames, the pensioner, as has been here this thirty year—ask any one, and they will all tell you the same story."

"Story indeed!" cried Mrs. Jackson, with a rude laugh.

"Well, it's a true story, ma'am—but you need not hear it unless you like it."

"Oh, but I should like to hear it very much," her naturally robust curiosity coming to the front. "Please do tell it to me."

"Well, twenty years ago, more or less, some young officers lived in that bungalow, and one of them in a passion killed his Khitmatgar. They say he never meant to do it, but the fellow was awfully cheeky, and he threw a bottle at his head and stretched him dead. It was all hushed up, but that young officer came to

a bad end, and the house began to get a bad name—people died there so often—two officers of *delirium tremens*—one cut his throat, another fell over the verandah, and broke his neck—and so it stands empty! No one stays a week.”

“And why?” demanded the other boldly; “lots of people die in houses, they must die somewhere.”

“But *not* as they do there!” shrilly interrupted Mrs. Clark. “The Khitmatgar comes round at dusk, or at night, just like an ordinary servant, with pegs or lemonade and so on. Whoever takes anything from his hand seems to get a sort of madness on them, and goes and destroys themselves.”

“It’s a fine tale and you tell it very well,” said Mrs. Jackson, rising and nodding her red cock’s feathers, and her placid, dark, fat face. “There does be such in every station; people must talk, but they won’t frighten *me*.”

And having issued this manifesto, she gave her hostess a limp shake of the hand and waddled off.

“She’s jealous of the grand big house, and fine compound, fit for gentry,” said Mrs. Jackson to herself, “and she thinks to get me out of it. Not that *she* could get in! for she has to live in quarters, and she is just a dog in the manger, and anyways it’s a made-up story from first to last!”

As she reached her abode, and called “*Qui hai! buttie lao!*” a figure came out from the passage, salaamed respectfully, and by the light of a two-anna lamp on the staircase, she descried the strange Khitmatgar, whose appearance was perfectly familiar to her, a short, square, surly-looking person. No doubt he was one of Kadir’s many friends, the lower rooms were generally overrun with his visitors.

“Send Kadir!” she said imperiously, and went upstairs, and as she spoke the man salaamed again and vanished.

The wife of his bosom had a fine tale to tell Mr. Jackson the next morning, as with a very shaky hand, he was touching up some plates in his own room.

“A Khitmatgar that offers free pegs!” he exclaimed, with a shout of laughter. “Too good to be true. Why, I’d take a whisky and soda from the devil himself—and glad to get it. My mouth is like a lime kiln at this moment—*Qui hai! whisky-pani do!*”

Many days, warm and sweltering days, rolled on, the hot winds

blew the crackling leaves before them, blew great clouds of red dust along the roads, blew ladies up to the hills, and dispersed many of Jackson's patrons. But he did not care, he had made a good many rupees, he had more than one boon companion and he drank harder than ever. "Why not?" he said, "he had earned the money and had the best right to spend it." He was earning none now. When customers came, Kadir always informed them the sahib was *sota* (asleep), Yes, sleeping off the effects of the preceding night. Mrs. Jackson was accustomed to this state of affairs, and what she called his "attacks." She rocked herself, fanned herself and dozed, and did a little crochet, whilst the two children played quietly in a back room, with old photographs and bits of cardboard. When her husband did awake, and enjoy a few hours' lucid interval, it was only to recall bills and duns, and flashes of his old life: the cool green park at home, the hunting field, reviews at Aldershot, his pretty cousin Ethel. Then the chill reality forced itself upon his half-crazing brain. The park was this great, barren, scorched compound, with the hot winds roaring across it; the figure in the verandah was not Ethel in her riding habit, but Fernanda in carpet slippers and a greasy old dressing gown. Was this life worth living?

Mrs. Jackson had seen the Khitmatgar several times; once she noticed him looking down at her as she ascended the stairs, once he had appeared in answer to her call, carrying a tray and glasses, but she had boldly waved him away, and said, "Send Kadir, why does he allow strangers to do his work?" There was something far too human about the appearance of the man, for her to give a moment's thought to the ghost story.

One still hot night, a night as bright as day, Mrs. Jackson found the air so oppressive that she could not sleep. She lay tossing from side to side on her charpoy, looking out on the moon-flooded verandah, and listening to the indefatigable brain-fever bird, when suddenly she heard her husband's familiar call, "*Qui hai, peg lao!*" He had been drinking as usual, and had fallen into a sodden sleep in his own room.

After an unusually short interval, steps came up the stairs, shoes were audibly slipped off, and there were sounds of the jingling of a glass and bottle.

The door of Mrs. Jackson's apartment opened into the verandah and stood wide, on account of the intense breathless heat of

that Indian night. In a few moments some one came and paused on the threshold, tray in hand, some one who surveyed her with a grin of satanic satisfaction. It was the strange Khitmatgar. There was an expression in his eyes that made her blood run cold, and whilst she gazed transfixed with horror, he was gone. In a second she had jumped out of bed, she ran into the verandah. Yes, the long verandah was empty—he had disappeared. She called excitedly to her husband, no answer. She rushed into his room, to unfold her experience. Jackson was sitting at the table, or rather, half lying across it, his hands clenched, his features convulsed, his eyes fixed—quite dead.

He had swallowed one of his chemicals, a fatal poison. There was the usual ephemeral excitement occasioned by a tragedy in the station, the usual inquest and verdict of temporary insanity, and then a new nameless grave in the corner of the station cemetery.

* * * * *

Jackson's fate was generally attributed to whisky—or filthy country liquor—"Poor fellow, his position preyed on his mind, and he drank himself to death."

This was the universal opinion in mess room, barrack room and bazaar. But there were one or two people, including his wife and Mrs. Clark, who thought otherwise, and who gravely shook their heads and whispered—*The Khitmatgar*.

© Fortunatos Nîmîum !

FAIR in my eyes, beyond all scenes I know,
Is one small valley nestling in the West,
Blest with all beauty English vales can show
And breathing sweetness of the world unguessed.

Orchards are here, and fields of waving grain,
Barred to the west, where, towering o'er the downs,
With age-long hatred on the teeming plain
Rome's grassy rampart impotently frowns.

Faint from the field where lags the harvesting,
The reapers' homeward chorus takes the ear :
'Tis eventide ; the giant elm trees fling
A lengthening shadow : silence, far and near,

Descends, save that the amorous cushat dove
Tells to his mate the tale he oft hath told,
Where yon twin cedars from the silent grove
Lift their dusk heads athwart the sunset's gold.

Hushed is the busy life of bird and bee ;
The smoke steals upward through the windless air
From cottage roofs, where round the mother's knee
Children's low voices lisp their evening prayer.

Here, far from all delight that worldlings prize,
The mart's keen strife, the pleasure-seeking throng,
Sweet Meditation weaves her phantasies,
Marv'ling that toys should cheat her peace so long.

Ambition kills like frost, or mads like wine,
Less high the height attained than honour lost ;
Love's draught reveals the thirst alone divine,
Too often bitterest where we love the most.

Poor is the wealth that tempts the greed of thieves ;
Weary the strife whose bourne we cannot see ;
Friends may be faithless—Nature ne'er deceives ;
Here will I stay, and let the mad world be !

R. WARWICK BOND.

Kent's Wife.

By FLORENCE C. ARMSTRONG,
Author of "SISTERS OF PHAETON."

CHAPTER I.

"HE was always a throughgoin' lad, tho' too dour for my fancy. Ye are well rid o' him, Jennie;" and Mrs. Farquason laid down the letter which had brought the unexpected news of her godson's marriage, with an emphatic thump. "He might ha' told us more, when he was about it," she went on. "He doesn't say what the lass's name was, or a ha'porth about her, only that he's married, an' has to work harder than ever. Ma certy, I still thought Alison 'ud ha' looked for fortune in a wife. Gey an' fond was he o' the sillier when he was a lad, but he was a clever lad an' a hard-worked one, ay, an' richt weel-farrant (favoured). Preserve us, Jennie, sure it's no greetin' ye are? Touts, woman, quit; I'd ha' thought scorn to wet my eye for any lad under the sun when I was your age. Dry yer eyes, wean, an' think na mare o' thon' dour lad, that kem' o' bad stock on the father's side. Ye'll no mind Major Kent? Na, na, ye were but a wean when poor Alison went to her grave, many a year before her time—her man was a hask man, an' a dour. It's like he couldn't forgive himself for marryin' a poor country lass, tho' she came o' decent people and was just a real beauty. The grass wasn't green on her grave 'til he took the second wife, an' he left the lad to the mother's people, an' we done our duty by him. Sit ye down, Jennie, an' write him a ceevil letter, wishin' him joy."

Plain, common-place Jennie Roe wiped her dim eyes and obeyed her aunt's command, but there was a painful throb at her heart and a choking in her throat as she did so. She could recall from the past sundry passages of which her old relative knew nothing: episodes of the days when Alison Kent was only a promising pupil at the Belfast School of Medicine—days when the leaden casket, containing the sweet soul of his gentle cousin, was the dearest piece of womanhood in all the world—days when they looked forward to a life of usefulness amongst the Antrim glens, and nothing beyond until Death did them part. Ah! that was years ago. Since then the world

had claimed its own. Alison had won distinction, honours, not only in the local college, but in great, wonderful London. After that, alas! there was no more to be said about the country dispensary and the country wife. The homely lass, with her loyal heart, her kind, plain face, her honest grey-blue eyes and sandy hair, her broad Antrim accent and her meagre education, satisfied the ambitious youth no more. If he married at all, it must be some woman who could help him on in the world, not one whose social gifts were poor. So, good-bye, Jennie. Good-bye to the old life and the homely ways at the decent farm-house in out-of-the-world Glen Ooe. He kissed her when they parted, knowing well that he would never touch her honest lips again, and went back to fling himself into a newer life, a life full of action, where each day brought increase of receptive power, together with the growth of knowledge and the means of using it. He was fast climbing to the top of his tree, this steady, reserved, self-reliant young doctor. Already his opinion had its market value, and already his fellows recognized in him "a rising man." Intent upon a career, he partially withdrew himself from the fascinations of society, only mixing with a circle of his own, a band of ardent toilers, like himself, devoted to abstruse studies, and leading a life such as his old friends could no more comprehend than the books which from time to time issued from the pen that, his friends said, he used too seldom. Amongst his acquaintances there was one whose society possessed a far greater charm for him than the rest. He was a Hungarian sculptor, a man of high rank, and rich enough to devote himself to his art, without caring for reward, yet too perfect a master of it to be reckoned amongst the ignoble army of amateurs. Count Martis had an exquisite studio in the pleasantest part of courtly Kensington. It was a dainty spot, filled with costly and beautiful things. But it was not the charm of the gifted man's conversation which drew the clever young doctor to the place. There was a woman there, a pale, beautiful being, who filled a somewhat ambiguous position in the establishment. Dark and stately she was, with midnight hair, and eyes wonderful in colour, being of a rich grey-green, so thickly fringed with black lashes upon upper and under lids, as to look black themselves in certain lights. Very pale she was, but it was with the rich warm pallor of a Malmaison rose, and when she spoke her lips arched into the

most perfect curves. She called the count by his Christian name, and was treated by him with the utmost respect. In the absence of his mother, she invariably presided at his Sunday gatherings, with a certain imperial grace which enchanted the young man. She was usually more than reserved with the men who went and came about the studio, but to Alison she unbent. It was but the slightest possible unbending, yet it was there, and the young man became madly in love. There was something in her refined beauty, in her very coldness and reserve, which appealed to his senses in a way no other woman had ever done; while the touch of mystery there was around her increased her tantalizing charm; he was carried out of himself, swept away. He had a friend who warned him to be careful, but the warning came too late, and Jocelyn Le Breton went home to his fair young wife, grieved to the heart. The men had been friends from the time they met in Vienna, where they pursued the same studies, achieving almost equal honours, and were regarded by the professors as the most promising men of the day. Le Breton was fairly rich, and shortly after he had settled in London, with Alison for a partner, he married a bright, tender-hearted girl, who was devoted to him. "That woman has a history," she said, as they talked together in the boudoir he had made beautiful for her. "I don't like women who have histories. Besides, I am sure the count——" she pursed up her little mouth. "Oh, no, I don't mean what you think I mean, but I am sure the count knows all about her. I intend to ask him."

"No, you won't, Nancy; you'll not be spitefully inquisitive. Alison has made his bed. How he feels now that the thing is accomplished is his own affair. We must call on Mrs. Kent and ask her to dine."

"She won't come," said pretty Mrs. Le Breton.

"How do you know? Now that she is Alison's wife, she'll be very unlike what she was as——"

"As what?" inquired the little lady.

"You are a provoking puss. How do I know what position she held in Martis' *ménage*? His mother sanctioned her presence there."

"She did, I grant you; but, believe me, that young person has had a past—a stormy past, if I am any judge of faces. Hers looks as if it had been frozen up once upon a time; it may thaw some day when we least expect it. Mr. Kent has made a daring

experiment; he scarcely realizes how daring. He is not a man to be trifled with. There is a demon of jealousy in him," and Nancy shook her head. "I only hope there will be something to awaken her quietly, something which will take her quite away from the dark page which I am sure is folded down in the story of her life. Seems to me she is only half alive. The freezing process has gone far deeper than her face."

"But you'll be very nice to her, Nan," said her husband. "Remember old Alison is about the best friend I have in the world—and you see I wouldn't be half what I am if we did not work together."

"Don't fear on my account," his wife replied. "I'll do what I can, but you'll see Mrs. Kent won't accept my civilities, or if she does it will be in so chilly a fashion that we'll never get beyond the outworks of acquaintance."

And she was right. Shortly after the marriage, Alison Kent and his wife took up their residence in a charming *maisonette*, furnished as delightfully as heart could desire. Nothing could exceed the beauty of the home to which the devoted husband brought his wife, except the intensity of the passion which she had awakened in the heart of one who by nature was cool, calculating and reserved. His intense love for the woman he had won altered his whole nature. Silent and reserved in society, in her presence he cast off his coldness, and poured out before her all the treasures of a mind richly stored, and of a graceful fancy which lay buried deep in his soul unawares. But they rather avoided society. It is true they accepted some invitations, and Mrs. Kent's stately loveliness was much admired. In certain circles people looked at each other and asked who it was that this very clever and daring medical scientist had married. She was not like other women. Handsome, very handsome, and very good form, but—and there was no answer to that "but." The civil letter wishing him joy arrived in good time, and Alison read it with a faint sense of pain. And yet he had done nothing which warranted that little sting. He had been only a boy ten years or so ago; Jennie was far too sensible a girl to set store by any nonsense he might have talked to her. There had been perfect friendliness between them. Mrs. Farquason was different: she had been almost a mother to him; he never could forget her kindness. If he thought Louise would not object they

might pay a visit to Glen Ooe in the autumn. He had told her all about his boyhood, how his father had married a woman not just of his own rank, married for love, and repented.

She had heard him so far with a quiet curve on her beautiful mouth, which was scarcely a smile. "And are you quite certain you have not followed his example?" she inquired in that low-pitched voice of hers which made the harmony of his life.

"I am quite certain, more than certain," he replied; flinging himself at her feet and gazing into her face with worshipping eyes. "My queen, as if I could ever repent of anything which blessed me with you."

And she had just brushed his brow with her lips—no more—as she told him he loved her far too well.

CHAPTER II.

DURING the year following his marriage fortune smiled upon Alison Kent. Society received his wife, that is to say, she went occasionally to the houses of a few leading people, perfectly dressed, cold, calm, just a trifle disdainful, but so charming where she chose to charm that even Nancy acknowledged there was something very fascinating about Mrs. Kent. If Alison had loved her before marriage, he adored her with tenfold adoration now that she was the light of his home. Yet he was not satisfied. Who ever is satisfied in this weary world? No one breathed a hint that all was not perfect in his domestic life. He was not a man with whom even his dearest friend dare take liberties, and had he not accepted his wife's past when he swore to love and cherish her? Had he not promised her never to question or suffer a scintilla of suspicion to dwell in his heart concerning it? But yet—? He went about his daily tasks with a set purpose not to think there was anything in his wife's manner at which he could cavil; even when he felt most that it was not that of a woman who has given herself heart and soul to her husband. He remembered, with an uncomfortable sensation, how Jennie's homely face had kindled into something which, if it was not beauty, was almost as attractive, when she met him at the gate of the farm in the wild Antrim glen. He recalled flitting smiles and fugitive waves of colour; remembered how the delicate nerves around her large mouth would twitch and quiver. Was it treason to Louise to recal another woman's

love? Surely no, because he had never really loved that other woman, or any woman but herself. He would give half his world to see his wife's lovely face kindle into warmth as that plain, commonplace one had done in those departed days. Jennie loved him; in the light of the present he understood much which had been obscure before. Jennie was a simple soul, but she was a woman. In love, women generally reveal themselves, and with the passing of the year the man began to realize that his wife was as much of a mystery to him now as she had been in the days when she moved through Count Martis' studio, more like one of his statues endued with life than a living, sentient, loving being, capable of making the joy or misery of a man's life.

"I'm afraid it's coming," said Nancy Le Breton, as she danced her six-months' old babe on her knee. "Jock, I wish you'd give up those silly experiments you are trying, and devote yourself towards finding out what it is that has gone amiss between those two."

"Now, what is it you call silly experiments?" asked the husband. "I am working out one of the questions of the day, a thing which may prove about the greatest discovery of the century."

"Or else turn out to be all folly and nonsense. My dear Jock, I think I have read about this hypnotism as having caused a trifling sensation about a hundred years ago, when it figured under another name. My dear boy, don't be silly. Alison Kent does not believe in it."

"If there is anything you could be nasty about, Nan, it is your scepticism on what I consider one of my strongest points. I could convince you against your will, if I were so minded; and as to Alison, I have very good reason to believe he is changing his mind upon the subject. We had a long talk yesterday."

She jerked her lovely boy up and down upon her knee in silence for a few minutes.

"Jock," she said, "Alison has got a look in his eyes which hurts me—a hungry, starved expression. Have you set him thinking? Or is it that woman?"

Le Breton was silent for a moment.

"I warned him," he said. "I bade him pause before committing himself for life. But it was no use."

"He didn't thank you for it either," the little wife replied.

"Certainly he has never been so frank with me since his

marriage," her husband rejoined. "But if there is anything amiss——"

"There is something amiss. Can't you see it? Because you must be blind if you don't."

"Poor Alison!"

"He did a very foolish thing. Why did he not marry a woman whose past was not as clear as ——"

"Your own?" inquired her husband. "Nan, you never gave a thought to any man but myself."

She laughed, a clear ringing laugh.

"Perhaps not," she said. "If you choose to think so, it is not my business to contradict you."

"I am sure of it," he said; "and what's more, I shouldn't believe you if you said anything to the contrary. But let us be serious. I have observed the expression you mention in Alison's face, and the last time I saw his wife I thought she looked ill and worn."

The happy young wife bent her head above her baby.

"If there was only a little child there," she said, with a catch in her voice.

"Now, how like you that is! Because you are perfectly crazed over that child of yours, you think Mrs. Kent would be just the same. No, she is not that kind of woman."

"Crazed over my baby! Am I indeed! Let me tell you I am not one scrap more mad about him than you are yourself. Don't I see you sit gazing at him sometimes, when you think I am not looking; and I know you are planning out his future, and how he will take up your work where you leave it down. He won't, you know. I'm quite sure he'll be a dear rascal, who will give us any amount of trouble, and do exactly as he likes. He'll be wilful and positive, and a darling," and she covered the little face with kisses.

After that her husband knew there was not the least use in expecting anything like common sense from her rosy lips.

But her words troubled him, and out of the perfect confidence and trust of his own life he looked upon that of his friend with a heavy heart. Yet there was nothing seemingly amiss in the household. Mrs. Kent's conduct was above suspicion. She lived in the light of day, fulfilling her social duties with an ease and grace which showed how familiar such things were to her.

True, she made no friends ; true, also, that even her adoring husband could not penetrate the ring of ice with which she had encompassed herself. Yet she was one of those women who possess an enormous attraction for men. It was not alone her beauty, which was of a very uncommon type, that charmed them, but that vague something around her, which told you she was a woman with a history—a history which each man read differently—but which her husband knew was the story of a past buried, but not dead. Day by day the jealous dread of that past grew upon him. It went with him in his daily tasks, put icy hands between him and the woman he adored, and wound like a serpent round his heart. The thing became torture to him ; there were days when he could have rent her with his hands, or in a frenzy of affection flung himself at her feet, imploring for one tender word. These moods she would not see. Cold and calm she met him day after day. Always gentle, always dignified ; with never a flash of fire to light the depths of her mysterious eyes, or ruffle the white stillness of her regal brow. Sometimes it was more than he could bear, and on more than one occasion he burst into a wild appeal to her, begging and praying for her love ; and more than once she told him he must learn to restrain his temper, as her nerves were not equal to the strain he put upon them. But, outside the walls of his home, he never uttered a whisper of the agony which was consuming his soul. Jocelyn Le Breton met him day after day ; they walked together to the great hospital, where both the men occupied high positions ; they studied deep subjects ; consulted over new developments of the science they both loved ; disputed, agreed, or agreed to differ, like the truest of comrades, but Louise Kent's name never passed her husband's lips. It was winter, and a keen frost accompanied by a biting east wind swept the great city, bringing along with it a mantle of fog, which lay over the houses like a heavy pall. For the first time since their marriage Alison Kent saw an alteration in the beautiful face which confronted him daily ; a change which struck terror into his soul.

"Louise, you are ill," he said tenderly, one day, as they sat alone after their evening meal. "I have noticed that your appetite is failing, and you have grown thinner."

She cast her usual smile at him, that smile which never reached her eyes. "I have had neuralgia," she said. "I am rather

subject to it, but hitherto I have always found that keeping quiet, or taking just a little chloral puts it away. Really, it is nothing worth troubling over."

"Worth troubling over!" he cried. "As if anything which caused you the very slightest pain was not worth my best energies. Let me have at least the pleasure of curing you."

Again she smiled. "I fear it is too late to quite cure me," she said. "I have had it since I was little more than a child. It goes away after a while."

"But you will take a prescription of mine," he cried eagerly; "one I have never known to fail."

"I shall be glad to take anything you prescribe," she said; "but do not distress yourself, because I am not so bad as all that."

But as the days passed, and the biting east wind nipped the nerves of even the strongest with pincers of steel, Mrs. Kent's neuralgia became a more serious thing than she cared to acknowledge. She took the medicine which Alison prepared for her, lived according to the rules he laid down, and all to no purpose. Dark rings appeared around the deep-set eyes, little hollows showed themselves in the rounded cheeks. "Is she going into consumption?" asked Mrs. Le Breton of her husband. "Jock, that woman's heart is breaking."

They were constantly at her house, and the cheery little woman did all in her power to brighten the gloom overhanging it, but although Louise appeared to enjoy the pleasant face and merry voice of her acquaintance, there was nothing in the least resembling confidence between them. "Jock, she baffles me at every turn. I give her up as an enigma to which there is no possible solution;" and Nancy Le Breton went to her nursery with a heavy heart.

Had Count Martis been in London, Le Breton would have endeavoured to make him act as mediator between the husband and wife, but the sculptor had settled in Rome for the winter, his mother residing permanently there.

"If I could only know of anything which would relieve her," Alison said to his friend. "She does not sleep; she takes the opiates I prescribe, but they have no effect; her face grows paler and more wasted day by day. Jock, it's too horrible to see the woman you love suffering, and to know that all your boasted skill is powerless to afford her a moment's respite from pain."

"You'll laugh at me, Alison," his friend replied; "but laugh away. I might be able to help you if you would allow me to try."

"As how?" he cried, turning almost fiercely on his friend. "If there is anything——"

"There is something. You call it only folly, but in cases of nervous disease which baffles all ordinary remedies, as this neuralgia of your wife's appears to have done, I have seen it succeed—nay, I have made it succeed myself."

"You are thinking of your pet bit of humbug, hypnotism," Alison retorted. "Man alive, I have ceased to try and argue you out of your craze, but don't think you have converted me to it. No, no, I'll never believe in it until I can do it myself."

"Why don't you try, then? Have I not often told you that you could hypnotize a patient if you tried? Try it on me if you like," and Jocelyn looked steadily into his friend's face.

"Folly," he replied. "You are a stronger man than I. I know I could not have power over you; with a weaker subject I might possibly do something. But what use is all this?"

"May I mention the thing to Mrs. Kent? She is a sensible woman, and I am quite certain will be only too glad to find something which would relieve her sufferings."

"You are at liberty to mention it whenever you please," Alison replied. "If she consents to your trying it, I have not the least objection to the experiment."

"You will promise to be present," Le Breton said, "otherwise I would not think of doing it."

"When you have my wife's consent, you may think of asking me to preside at your *séance*," he said lightly. "I will promise so much."

"Then I'll ask her if I may try, before we are either of us an hour older," Le Breton said decidedly.

CHAPTER III.

"ALLOW you to hypnotize me? What does my husband say to it?"

Mrs. Kent reclined in a low, luxurious chair, looking like some exquisite white exotic, upon which the withering touch of frost had fallen. The shadows under her eyes were deeper, the hand supporting her white, worn cheek was thin almost to transparency. Under the flowing folds of her graceful tea-gown the man's

professional eye could detect how the rounded limbs had fallen away. "She is a perfect wreck," he thought.

"I would be glad of anything which brought relief. Although I never believed much in the remedy you mention, I heard wonders about it in Paris not long ago."

"It was in Paris it first commended itself to my notice," he replied eagerly. "I was present at some very successful experiments there. I could pile instance upon instance of its effects in nervous diseases. Even Alison acknowledges that there is something in it."

"I had never the slightest doubt of that," she rejoined, in her low, tired voice. "If you think you can have any effect upon me, please try."

"I thought you would see it in the proper light," cried the doctor. "I told your husband so. I promised, however, that he should preside at what he jokingly chose to call my *séance*, and so I really must ask you to wait until he returns."

She uttered a faint laugh. "Alison thinks far too much about me," she said. "He, too, is an enthusiast in his fashion."

"He is the dearest old fellow in the world," cried his faithful friend; "and he is far ahead of me in every branch of our trade. I wish you could hear him lecture. He has the most wonderful magnetic power over his audience; holds those wild young fellows spell-bound while he speaks. There isn't a man amongst them who doesn't worship him. You ought to be proud of your husband, Mrs. Kent."

Over the beautiful worn face before him passed a sudden change. He told his wife afterwards that it looked exactly as if some freezing wind blew across it, congealing every drop of blood in the blue veins, and turning every sentient nerve rigid. She glided a slender hand across her brows. "I suffer so," she murmured. "It is horrible." And that was the only whisper of complaint that ever crossed her lips.

Dr. Le Breton was at her side in a moment. "Let me make a pass or two over your forehead," he cried. "I am almost certain it would relieve you."

With a strange, quivering smile she looked into his eyes, and bade him have his will.

Talking it over afterwards with his wife, he said it was the most singular case he had known. "I tell you, Nan, if I hadn't

hypnotized her she would have sent me into the trance," he said. "She just fixed me with those wonderful eyes of hers, and, heavens! I felt the thrill go down my back like cold steel. I knew it would be a struggle between us; perfectly unconscious on her part, but there all the same. You are right, there is something very singular about that woman."

"Well, what happened?" Nancy asked, deeply interested in what she had so often ridiculed. "I wish I had been present."

"I'm very glad you weren't, because I felt startled myself—she went off almost at once—but my heart kept plunging for half an hour afterwards with the exertion those few seconds cost me. Then Alison came in. She appeared to recognize his influence, for she cowered back amongst her cushions, and stretched out her hands with a curious gesture."

"She hates him, then?" put in the little wife. "Oh, Jock, I feared it."

"Now, how you run away with a story," cried her husband. "She mayn't be just as much in love with her good man as some other folks that I know, but I would be very sorry to say she hated him."

"I'm not an idiot about you, sir," retorted Nancy. "Don't flatter yourself too much on that score. You are all very well, but if it wasn't for baby——" and she made a little *moue*.

"If it wasn't for baby, I suppose you'd agree to the three-years system they wrote about in those silly papers some time ago?"

She made believe to stamp her little foot, "Will you go on with what you understand?" she cried impatiently. "Can't you see I am dying with curiosity?"

"You very—woman," he replied. "I ought not to gratify your weakness, but seeing that you are the half of me, why, I shan't keep any secrets from you."

"Do—do go on. How you can torment me when you like," and she pouted so prettily that Jock Le Breton could not help laughing at her sweet grimace.

"She shall not be tormented any longer," he said, growing grave at once. "When Alison had been some minutes in the room, the change passed off. I looked at him, I must confess, with a certain amount of triumph in my face. 'You have succeeded,'

he said in a whisper. 'I'll try next time.' Then the tension appeared to give way, my heart ceased to plunge, I felt my strength returning. 'Alison,' I said, 'are you exercising power over her? mine has ceased.' He did not look at me, only nodded, and I saw he was as pale as she, and that his eyes were absolutely blazing. Suddenly he gave a great start. I looked at the patient—and—you were right, Nan: that set face of hers thawed with a vengeance. I could not have believed it if I had not seen it. The colour poured back into her cheeks, the hard lines about her mouth relaxed. Her eyes became full of a softer beauty, and on my soul, I could not have believed that the woman lying there, gazing into space with that ecstatic expression, was the iceberg we have known. She lay there, with her lips moving, although no sound escaped them, a sight beautiful, but terrible. Nan—the agony of poor Alison's face, as he stood gazing at her, was the most appalling thing I ever witnessed. He had turned gray and pinched like a man of seventy. Nan, what is it?"

"Tell me the end," she whispered. "You did not leave him like that."

"I saw his face work painfully—he made an effort to control himself—and beckoned me out of the room. He went straight to his dining-room and did what I never saw him do before—pour out a large glass of brandy, and drink it neat. Then he faced round. 'Your experiment has been a success,' he said; 'I believe in it now. Odd, wasn't it, that I could take her out of your hands,' and he laughed. Nan, although I hate to see a man cry, knowing how much it costs them, I'd rather a thousand times have seen the tears pouring down poor Alison's face than heard him utter that horrible laugh. It was like the laughter of a madman," and Le Breton shuddered. "My wife, this cannot end well."

"Go on," she said.

"We went back to the room, where I told Alison I must take her out of the trance, as I had thrown her into it—but, to my surprise, it was at his touch she awoke—or rather, passed from one condition to another. She got up from the couch, shook my hand, and thanked me for the relief I had given her—and if ever I saw a patient in the power of any one, she was entirely in her husband's. I do not understand it. Alison has complete control

over her. In his state of mind I very much wish he had not. He may use it as a means to find out what it will break his heart to know. The worst of it is, that he is such an obstinate fellow; one who, when he takes a thing into his head, will go through with it at any cost. There may be harm done, which we will be powerless to prevent."

"I am very sorry you lent yourself to any such experiment," said Nancy. "It looks very like playing with fire."

There was a strange elation in Alison's manner when the friends met next morning.

"Louise has had a famous night's rest," he said hastily, anticipating Le Breton's question. "You must try your power upon her again."

Le Breton demurred; but Kent laughed aside his scruples.

"How lovely she looked," he went on, with a certain wildness in his eyes, which troubled his friend. "I will photograph her while she lies in that condition. Jock, did you ever see anything more perfectly enchanting?"

Le Breton said he had always considered Mrs. Kent the most beautiful woman of his acquaintance.

"But you never saw her look as lovely as she did then," Alison cried. "Her beauty was unearthly. Am I not a fortunate man, old lad?"

They were walking along rather a lonely part of the Embankment. Le Breton faced slowly round, standing opposite his friend, and looking at him steadfastly. "I think you are not quite your usual self to-day," he said. "Remember you have to meet a few hundred prying eyes before many minutes. Forget what has occurred—when the lectures are over we can discuss the matter coolly. I will return to your house and see Mrs. Kent in your presence. If she desires it, I will again exercise any power I have upon her for good."

Alison uttered a wild laugh. "You are the most discreet of men, old chap," he said. "Now to pull a long face, and give it to those young rascals pretty strong."

He grew more composed, and by the time they reached the hospital, was so much like his real self, the cold, impassive man of science, that his friend wondered if the whole thing had been a dream.

CHAPTER IV.

BUT some days elapse before he again visited Mrs. Kent. He was not many minutes in her presence before he observed an alteration in her manner. She appeared fluttered, as he told his wife, and, an unusual thing for her, received him with a smile.

She told him, with a gaiety of voice and gesture altogether new to her, how grateful she was to him for the relief from pain which he had afforded her, and almost before he had time to reply, asked him to try his powers once more.

A strange reluctance came upon him for a moment, but when he saw the wonderful grey eyes lifted to his in sweet appeal, and heard her curving lips murmur, "What a blessing it must be, the possession of such power to relieve pain," he forgot everything else, and almost before he realized it she glided away into the unknown.

As she sunk back amongst her pillows, the expression of ecstatic joy which had endued her face with such unearthly beauty at the first experiment returned again. Allison breathed hard; he caught his friend's arm in almost a frenzied grasp. "Look!" he gasped; "look!"

"What is it you are willing her to do?" Le Breton demanded in a low whisper. Alison recoiled as if he had struck him. "Hush!" he gasped, but the other broke from him and, laying his hand upon her brow, willed her to awake. Her husband uttered an exclamation.

"You are spoiling it all with your scruples, Le Breton," he said impatiently. "Let her be."

But Le Breton had already drawn back the soul from the unknown regions through which it had been travelling, and the face was settling into its familiar lines, natural sleep succeeding the nervous tension of trance.

"Let us leave her thus," he whispered. "She will awaken free from pain."

But Alison stood gazing at her with that expression in his eyes which had startled his friend.

"Alison," he said, "Alison, rouse yourself; I think you ought to be convinced now."

He glanced round like a man awaking from deep slumber. "Yes," he responded in a broken voice, "I ought to be convinced now."

"Let us leave her to herself," Jocelyn said. "In an hour or so she will awaken free from all trace of pain. As it is, we disturb her."

Using some slight compulsion, he made Alison follow him to the study, which was close at hand, and there the friends sat silent for a long time.

"This is certainly very strange." It was Alison who spoke first. "Have you many similar cases?"

"No; in London one has not the opportunity. I have one other case—a man, a painter fellow, who has gone to the dogs, but whose case presents some very strange phenomena."

"Ah—a nervous patient?"

"Rather. Case of D. T., I regret to say. Complete break down."

"Poor devil! Does he live near?"

"Not very. The other side of the river, Battersea way."

"I'd like to see you try your powers upon him, Jock, if you have no objection," Alison said eagerly. "I mean to study the thing in all its bearings, having at length been convinced that there is something in it."

"Then you had better go over to Paris, and watch the experiments at the Salpêtrière school. It was there I learned almost all I know."

"I could not leave London. I must read up the subject. There are trustworthy books about it?"

"Most certainly."

"Tell me more about this patient of yours. A clever artist once, I dare say?"

"Uncommonly. The poor chap had several pictures exhibited, two in the Academy and some in the Grosvenor. He can only use his pencil now while I am present to keep his hand steady. He'll not last long."

"Will you let me see him?"

"If he has no objection; but the unfortunate fellow is morbidly sensitive about the state into which he has fallen. No wonder."

"You could introduce me while he is in the trance. That is all I want."

Le Breton was silent for a moment. "It doesn't seem fair," he said. "I'll ask him if you may come to my study the first time

he lets me experimentalize. He was a gentleman once, and I treat him as such still, although he has fallen into the lowest depths."

"Surely you do not think it likely he will find cause for offence in my manner?" asked Kent, in a tone of slight annoyance.

"My dear fellow, did I suggest such a thing?"

"Well, but no matter; I might be able to give the poor chap a lift in a small way. I daresay he is desperately out at elbows."

"That's it. He is poor and proud. Even from me he will accept little or nothing. But we must not let Mrs. Kent continue too long in the trance; it may weaken her."

They returned to the drawing-room, to find her sleeping the peaceful sleep of a little child. "She seems so quiet," her husband said; "would it not be well to let her rest? Remember, she has suffered terribly from want of sleep." He spoke in a constrained voice, and kept his head averted from her.

Le Breton felt her pulse; it beat naturally. He listened to her calm respirations; her breath came and went gently. She was evidently taking natural repose, which would refresh and strengthen her. He looked up at her husband, and nodded his head. "You are right," he said. "We must let her sleep."

They were walking home together from the hospital some few days afterwards, and Alison was talking eagerly on the subject in which he had begun to take a feverish interest.

"I got hold of some hypnotic literature," he said. "Those French fellows have made a lot out of it; the pity of it is, they don't appear to be able to utilize it thoroughly."

"I am not so sure of that—I saw some strange things when I was last in Paris. You know I went over on purpose. I was so much interested in poor Clare's case that I took a run over to see if there was anything similar in the hospitals."

"Clare? Is that the artist you told me of?"

Le Breton nodded. "Saw him yesterday," he said. "I made him sketch a boy on donkey's back. The way in which I can compel him to keep his poor shaking hand steady is something quite wonderful."

"In his case you think it has been of use?"

"Undoubtedly. I have acquired so strong an influence upon him as to enable me to prevent his killing himself with whisky. I only will him to drink so much each day, and positively, in

these last weeks, I find I can make a very considerable reduction in the amount. I might have saved him had I only seen him in time."

"Now, Jock, do you mean to tell me that, at a distance, say, when you are down at the hospital, or in your house in Kensington, you can influence a man in Battersea? Don't try to make my credulity stretch too far."

"My dear fellow, when I have acquired perfect command over a patient, over any patient, space is a secondary consideration."

"Do you imagine you could throw my wife into the trance, say, from where we are this moment?"

"No, I have not sufficient power over her, and moreover, she is a woman of strong character. I think I would always require to be present in her case."

"But if her physical powers were reduced, if she was in a weak state, and if you had exercised your influence over her every day for a month, what then?"

"I believe that under those circumstances I could make her obey me, not only through the distance between my house and yours, not only from where we are standing at this moment, but I might go so far as to say from almost the other side of the world," Jocelyn said decidedly. Alison watched him with down-drawn brows. "It is not every man could be trusted with such powers," he muttered.

"Most certainly not, and one of the things which has brought hypnotism into disfavour is the fact that unworthy men and women have used it to unworthy ends."

His companion responded with a harsh laugh.

"But I think you are to be trusted," he said.

CHAPTER V.

"REALLY, Jock, if I were at all inclined to be jealous, I must say I should not have to go far afield for cause." Nancy Le Breton was waiting dinner for her good man, who for the last few days had been unusually irregular in his comings and goings. "You have certainly caught hypnotism on the brain, you and Alison. What is the latest discovery you have made?"

Le Breton flung himself into his chair. "I'll tell you everything if you only give me time, little woman," he said. "Look

here. If I had had an idea of how this matter would have developed, nothing under the sun would have tempted me to meddle in it."

"I told you you were playing with fire," the little lady responded. "What now?"

"Give me some dinner first, and then a sight of the boy; afterwards I'll make a clean breast of the whole matter."

"He shall have his dinner, and he shall see his boy, and he shall not be asked a single question until he chooses to speak himself," said the wise little wife as she rang the bell. She was rather astonished at her husband's rising from his chair the moment the servant who answered her summons had closed the door behind him, and flinging his arms around her, "Thank God for you, Nancy!" he almost groaned, as he clasped her close. "Thank the God of Heaven for the deep love of a pure woman!"

She knew him too well not to be aware that something very unusual must have stirred his being to its depths before he put into words the strong affection which was the very ground-spring of his life. Ordinarily speaking, they took the great love existing between them so much as a matter of course that they never mentioned it. It was only when some earthquake shook their souls that they suffered it to appear. She knew that she was all in all to her husband, and he understood her perfectly; therefore they sparred, and had their small differences, never fearing to touch the great depths below. Now she responded to his caresses, and when they went into the dining-room there were tears in her eyes.

But they chattered lightly over their meal, and when they had visited the upper regions, where their child was lying, lapped in his rosy sleep, they went to Jock's pet "den;" but even there she did not force his confidence, just letting him take his own time to tell all that was in his mind.

"You know that Alison has been bothering me about meeting Clare, and seeing how the thing worked in his case," he said, breaking suddenly into the topic which was engrossing his thoughts.

"You told me so."

"Exactly. Well, I'm very sorry I ever mentioned the fellow. I'm afraid there will be some catastrophe through it all."

She did not remind him that she had told him so.

"Alison has been haunted by some terrible suspicion of his wife, as we both only know too well. What else could come of a marriage under the circumstances? Some days ago, he insisted upon having her photographed while she was under the spell. Oh, Nan, she is almost too beautiful when the mask falls off and you see her as she must have been before the evil days, whatever those evil days were. Really, I could not blame him, although I did my utmost to prevent it. Well, he had a photo taken—a most vile blur it turned out to be—and I laughed at him for his pains, but he was most fiery upon it, and, will I nill I, he insisted upon Clare seeing it, and seeing it while he was in the trance."

"What on earth did he mean?" asked the innocent woman, with wide-open eyes.

"I ought to have known. Surely I have read enough and seen enough to have warned me. I knew of similar cases in the Salpêtrière, but the enthusiasm of the thing carried me on, and Alison kept saying he did not believe this and he did not believe that, until I brought Clare over and threw him into the hypnotic state. Then I put the blurred, black thing into his hand, and told him to describe what he saw."

Le Breton paused. His wife drew nearer to him and slid her hand into his. "Well," she whispered softly, "don't go on if it hurts you to tell me the rest."

"No," he cried hastily. "So far from hurting me, I feel that if I do not tell you, I'll never shake off the pain of it. Clare took the confused brown blur in his hand. 'You are not the man,' he said; 'he is as beautiful as she.' Nancy, I trembled all over as I saw Alison place a pencil between the poor limp fingers. 'Draw the man,' he said, and the patient obeyed. The shaking hands recovered their cunning, and in a few moments there was a sketch of a magnificent-looking young fellow in a uniform."

"Of course you snatched it away?" cried Nancy eagerly.

"I did not get the chance; I had only a glimpse of it, when Alison hid it in his pocket-book. Nan, it can come to no good."

"Poor Mrs. Kent," the woman's thoughts flew to the woman; "I must go round and see her in the morning."

"Let us go together. I reproach myself bitterly for having mentioned Clare to him. I feel as if I had been accessory to some deed of darkness."

"I vote you innocent," his wife said gently. "Alison was sure to find out sooner or later. But it has come to pass in a strange way."

"He has only found out grounds for suspicion. How can he use them?"

"I think I know," Nancy said. "He will show the thing to his wife."

Her husband shook his head.

"You are right," he groaned; "it will be a refinement of cruelty; like seething the kid in its mother's milk."

"You saw the sketch. Had it any resemblance to Count Martis?"

"Not the slightest, which was the greatest relief to me. I confess I trembled at the thought. But this man looked tall, slight and fair; Martis, as you know, is rather short and very dark."

"It appears as if mixed with magic," Nancy said slowly. "Jock, dear, it's an unholy thing."

"Ah, well, we won't discuss that side of it just now. I acknowledge that I was utterly taken aback at the result of the experiment, and for a moment I lost my head. After all, the thing may be only a fancy sketch of Clare's; I do not see that there is any way of verifying it."

"No way but the one which Alison is sure to take."

"If there is any truth in the suspicion to which it has given rise, it will be the keenest agony to that unfortunate woman. Fancy her feelings at finding the secret she has guarded so closely brought to light, and brought to light in so mysterious a manner."

"That is, supposing it to be true; supposing the man drew what he really saw. Jock, are you sure you examined that photo?"

"I did, most carefully, both before and after Clare had looked at it. I could distinguish the outline of Mrs. Kent's figure, but absolutely nothing else; the rest was a brown blur."

"The more you tell me about it the more mysterious it becomes. I will not rest comfortably until I know what he has done. Now tell me what became of the poor wretch who made the sketch?"

"Clare? Oh, I put him into a hansom and sent him home."

"Had he any recollection of what had transpired?"

"None whatever. They never do remember what occurs in the trance."

"Well, I think we have discussed it enough for one night. Now, Jock, you are to have a cigar and some stiff soda—I'll mix it for you—and we'll talk about my new bonnet, for instance, or that funny play we are going to see to-morrow night."

And the sensible little woman gradually drew her husband's mind away from the mysterious events of the day.

CHAPTER VI.

LIKE a man under the domination of some powerful evil spell from which there is no means of breaking free, Alison Kent lived through the few days succeeding the mysterious experiment into which he had tricked his friend. He suffered tortures. Loving his wife with all the forces of his being, he was torn by jealous agonies, racked by fears, which had become no longer vague and visionary, but realities. He had always known she did not love him as he wished to be loved. At the time of their ill-omened marriage she told him so; she had been honest with him; had asked him not to expect too much from her; in all honour she had offered to reveal the secret of her past, but, with a shudder, he remembered how she said that if he did not choose to hear it then, after she was his wife the tale would never pass her lips. He had laughed it off. He kissed her half-unwilling lips, and told her—fool!—that he trusted her all in all. She said she trusted him, that the past was past, and he promised. Had he kept his word? Had he acted like a man of honour? He quivered with the great anguish which was upon him, but even to his tortured soul he did not so much as try to justify himself. He knew that since her marriage she had been true to him. He knew her to be cold as snow, and again he writhed at the thought, for had not the icy coldness extended even to himself? True? Yes, but true to a past which he must know, must drag from her at any cost, even at the price of his own self-respect.

Day after day they met. He fancied she was a little brighter and more kind. Her very sweetness drove him wild with

pain; was she living under the impression left by that vision which hovered over her while she lay entranced? He knew she had forgotten the facts—if things so weird and mysterious could be reckoned amongst the actualities of life—perhaps some fleeting remembrance of the impression she then received lingered with her, as the memory of a dream will haunt and follow us through the working day. He was mad with pain. He felt that life under such conditions was no longer possible, could no longer be endured, and stung almost to madness, he went to her room: she bestowed a faint smile of welcome upon him, and, strange to say, encouraged him to speak of the curious influence, as she called it, which Dr. Le Breton had upon her.

His voice trembled in spite of himself as he asked her if she was conscience of dreams while under that influence.

Her complexion was of that transparent hue which betrays every passing emotion, and a wave of tender colour swept over her brow as she answered quietly, "Not actually of dreaming, but of remembering."

Had she looked into her husband's face she would have been startled; but the glorious grey eyes were fixed upon the fire, with a faint return of the ecstatic expression which had so rent his heart as she lay before him.

"Of remembering?" he repeated hoarsely.

She did not immediately reply, and he repeated his query.

"Yes, I seemed to go back to the days when I was a child—the days of which I sometimes wish to be reminded." And she uttered a low sigh.

"Yours was a happy childhood," he said, veiling his eyes with his hand.

"Ah, yes. I was very happy in my convent."

"Your convent?" he asked, because the reply had been utterly unexpected. "Your convent?"

"I was educated by the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, in Paris," she replied without the slightest hesitation. "They were very kind to me."

"I did not know——" he stammered.

"They made me very happy. I wish I had remained amongst them." She spoke very quietly.

"Louise, if you had remained amongst them we should never have met." There was a world of anguish in his voice.

With a faint curl of her lip she responded, "Possibly it might have been as well."

The dreamy eyes never left the leaping flames upon the hearth ; the beautiful hands toyed languidly with a fan she had taken from the mantelshelf ; she was back in that past which was a sealed book to him. The thought drove him almost mad.

"Louise, you cannot mean what you say," he cried in a tone of such pain that she looked at him with a slight raising of her delicate eyebrows.

"Is there anything so strange in my saying what I think?" she said. "Have I not always been honest with you?"

He absolutely writhed with anguish.

"You have the power of tormenting me beyond endurance," he cried. "Is it not enough that I love you with all my soul, enough that I would lay down my life to make you happy—and yet you tell me that perhaps it might have been as well if we had not met?"

"There is nothing strange in my saying so," she repeated. "Had you not met me, you would in all probability have met some other woman for whom you would have felt quite as deep an affection—some good, sensible person like Mrs. Le Breton, who would have rendered you far happier than I have done."

"Do you for one instant imagine that a commonplace woman like Le Breton's wife would have satisfied me? Never. I wanted you."

"I do not think this is in the slightest degree either profitable or pleasant conversation, Alison," she said. "Let us talk of something else." And she tossed the fan aside as she moved away from the fire. He caught her arm.

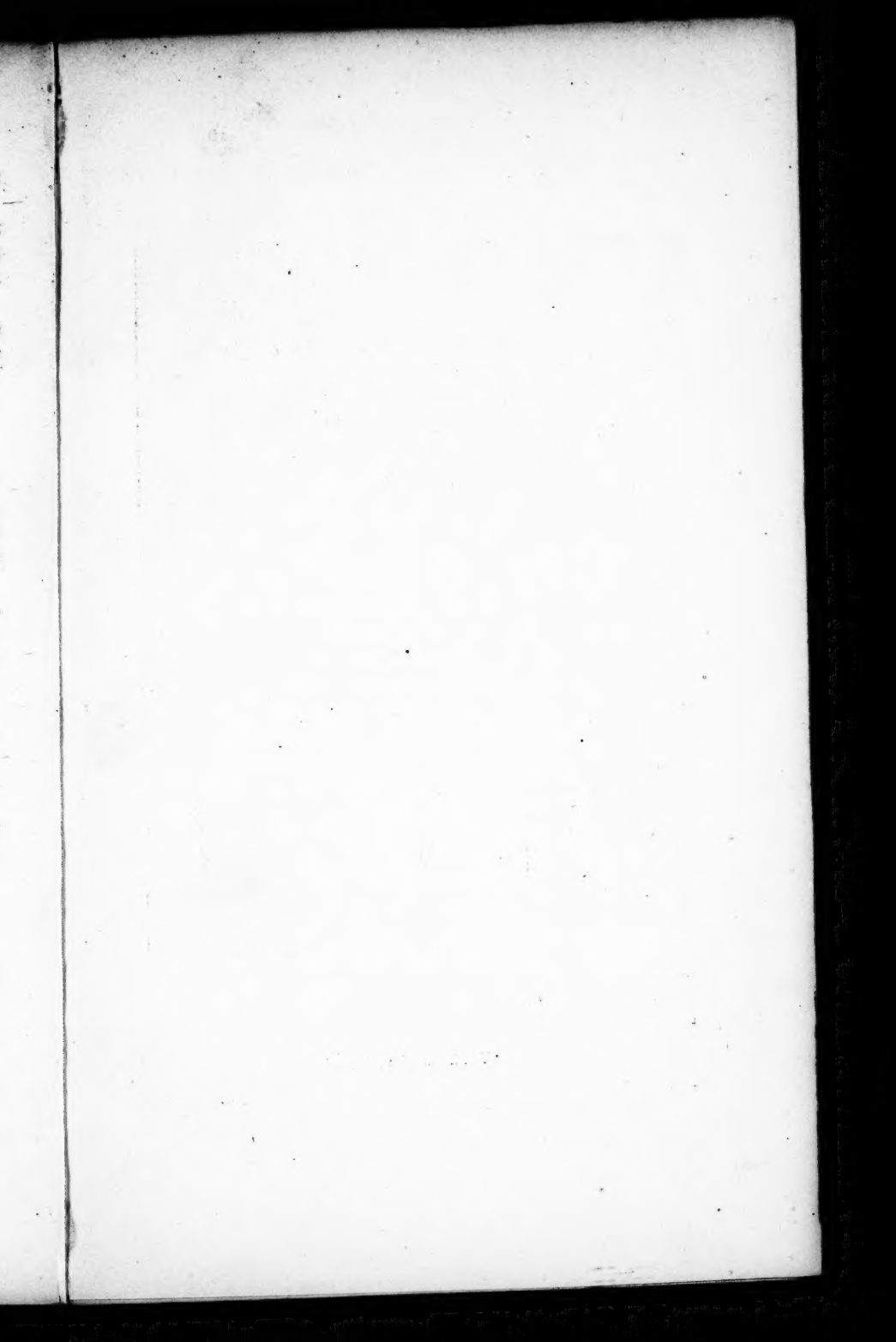
"Louise," he cried hoarsely, "Louise, my heart is breaking. You must hear me—you must."

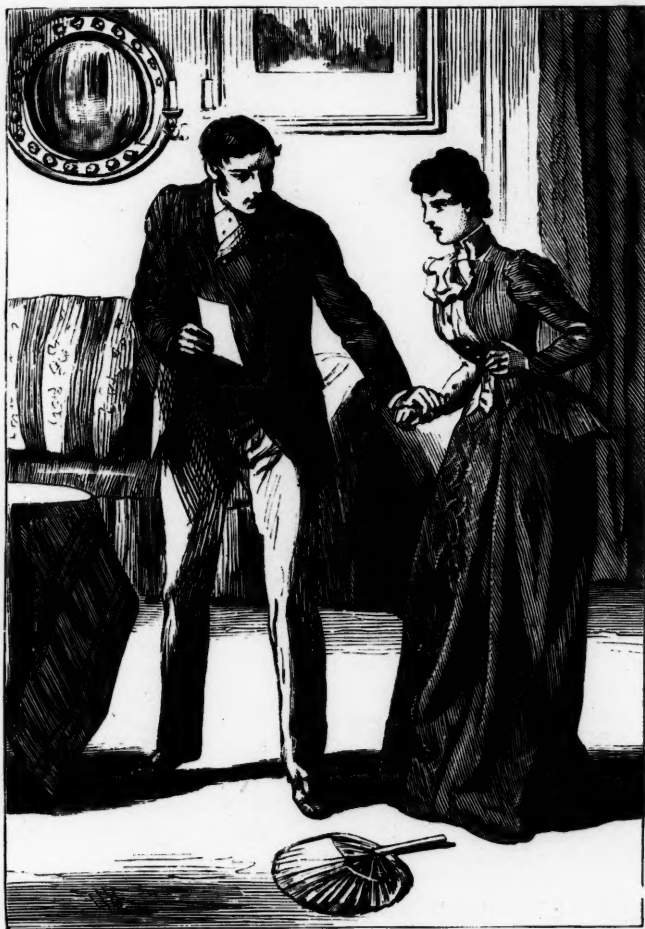
She grew white as death ; her eyes wavered under the fierceness of his gaze ; her lips parted ; her breath came quick and short like that of a hunted thing.

"Is this your pledged word?" she gasped. "Is this being a man of honour?"

His clutch on her arm grew stronger. The fire in his eyes more wild.

"I am your husband. I have a right to know the story you guard so carefully," he hissed into her ears.





"You know who this is?"

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"That you shall never know," she replied, her colour returning, her eyes flashing back defiance into his, her whole being in revolt against him. "Never—never—never!"

She had not raised her voice above a whisper, yet the fixed determination of her words fell on his heart like cold steel. They stung him into the action which made havoc of his life. Holding her firmly in his arm, he glided his hand into the bosom of his coat. "You know who this is?" he whispered, holding the sketch he had so strangely obtained before her glazing eyes. She sprang from him; every nerve in her body turned rigid; every drop of blood forsaking her face. Sprang from him and stood at bay. For a heart-beat of intensest agony she stood thus. Then she dashed at him, and tore the scrap of cardboard from his hand.

"You know," she uttered, still in an underbreath. "You know. Fool!—fool!—you knew there was a man between you and me. By whatever devil's trick you obtained this thing to make assurance doubly sure, I know not; but you have put it beyond doubt now. That was the man." She laughed a laugh of utter scorn, which rang in his ears through all the after time. "Go," she said. "I am your wife no longer. I will return to the good sisters, and never see your false face again. Go."

Then her strength departed from her, and she sank down at his feet, clasping the sketch close to her heaving bosom, and murmuring wild words over it as she lay prostrate before him.

For one short moment he stood above her, and there was murder in his heart as he bent to lift her from the ground. But a rush of better feelings came upon him, and with them a great desire to calm her passion-torn spirit.

"Sleep," he said, throwing all the strength that was in him into the almost agonizing wish to see her return to her cold, calm self. "Sleep," and he laid her on the couch, under the pale glow of the electric light. He was surprised at the effect of his words. The beautiful frame ceased to be shaken by the wild sobs which had convulsed it; the brows became smooth, the lips tranquil. A faint colour flickered back into the ghastly cheeks, and she lay amongst the heaped-up cushions, pale, death-like, but at rest.

Standing apart from her. Yearning over her with agonized
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desire to regain even the feeble hold he had had upon her life, the miserable man gazed upon the woman he adored.

He understood her character sufficiently well to understand that every chance of their reunion was at an end for ever—that from henceforth she was as one dead to him. The strength that was in her would hold them apart through all the dismal years to come. Nay; had she not threatened to return to this man, who had stood between them from the first? His hands clenched together until the nails bit into the flesh. She—his wife, yet no more his wife—she to go to another man with the secret of her past unspoken? She take her story back to the hero of it untold? Never—never—never! He had lost her for ever. Even so there was something between them which must not be lost.

* * * *

A ghastly, grey-faced man crept through the wild, blustery February morning to Jocelyn Le Breton's door. The young doctor was starting upon his rounds, but the sight of his friend sent him back to the study with terror in his face.

"I don't know. No one knows. She was quite well last night at dinner, and when—when I saw her afterwards. I went out, and returning late, did not care to disturb her. She has not been well, as you know. I—I—thought—she would be better alone. She made no noise. Never had stirred—but was lying on the bed." He paused to wipe his damp brows. "This morning—the maid—it was Rosalie who found her—" and his head fell forward. "Jocelyn," he gasped, "have we played with fire?"

* * * *

There was an inquiry into the strange and sudden death of the lovely Mrs. Kent, and nothing was left undone to discover its cause; but the greatest scientists were baffled, and the wisest shook their heads. "Sudden failure of the heart," was all they made out; and when they looked at the bereaved husband, they whispered amongst themselves that he would soon follow.

* * * *

Jocelyn Le Breton and his wife sat together on the bleak February day after the funeral. On both their faces there rested a heavy cloud. The baby-boy on Nancy's knee laughed and

crowed his loudest, and the young mother bent above his golden curls with tearful eyes. Le Breton was gazing into the fire with fast-closed lips and knitted brows.

"Alison has given up the hospital," he said abruptly. "His letter of resignation reached us this morning. He said that in consequence of his terrible bereavement he was going to travel for a long time, and that he could not, in justice to the house, remain on the staff of lecturers."

"I am glad," the wife said, "very glad. Jocelyn, shall we ever penetrate the mystery?"

"Never! That is, we guess," and he passed his hand across his brow.

She put the child on the floor and went to her husband's side. "I want you to promise me something," she said very earnestly. "I want your solemn word upon it."

He slid an arm around her, and so holding her, said slowly, "I think I know what it is. I have already made up my mind on the matter. I have done with hypnotism."

She let her head sink down on his breast. "Oh, my husband," she said, "life is too full of mysteries. Why dare we pry into secrets wisely hidden from us? You have seen the dreadful use to which this unholy power can be put. Believe me, no good can come of tampering with things which, even at their best, are of but little use, and which can be turned to such horrible ends. In this case I know you are free from blame. The only thing with which we can accuse ourselves is, not making known the awful suspicion which will haunt all our intercourse with your old comrade."

He put his hand on her red lips.

"Never put it into words, Nancy," he said. "Never, so long as we both shall live. For me, I have done with studies which lead men's feet into ways which they know not."

CHAPTER VII.

AUTUMN comes late in the Antrim glens. There was still a suspicion of summer sweetness in the September air as Jennie Roe stood at the gate of her farm and watched the smoke of a passing train float upward from the valley below. Very lovely looked the lonely glen as she watched the hovering wreath of vapour vanishing away in the still air. To the north-east the glen

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7°

opened upon a broad line of azure sea, with a ragged blue cloud resting low on the horizon—the shores of Scotland, familiar in that form ever since her childhood, but never seen nearer than from the place where she now stood. Closer, within reach, lay the white town, its harbour thick with a forest of tall masts. The town and the shipping formed the limit of her world. She looked across the fields, which were her own now, for the old uncle had left her owner of his land. With an eye to saving legacy duty and probate, he had passed over his aged wife, bequeathing everything to the girl. "Ye'll ay ha' a kind heart for th' ol' woman, my lass," he said. "I ken weel I can lippen (trust) till ye." And she had justified his trust. Mrs. Farquason was still mistress at the farm; only the labourers called Jennie "ma'am," and the bank account ran in her name. Offers of marriage she had had in plenty, but her answer was pat to the occasion: "I'll not bring in a master till I'm mistress," she said.

She only half understood herself that deep in her heart lay a craving unsatisfied, a hope unfulfilled. Now, as she looked across the glen, a wave of the old buried feeling came back upon her, and brought a mist before her eyes. She had not heard of Alison for close upon two years; not since he wrote to tell her of his wife's sudden death; but she thought of him now as she had not thought since then. Her life was full of work-a-day cares. The coming and going, buying and selling, the constant practice of the hard Ulster thrift, which was in her nature, was diverting her thoughts from the channel worn deep in her soul. Ah! long ago. She was almost angry with herself for idly dreaming now. Suddenly her heart gave a wild bound; because, up the green loaning from the main road came a figure which set all her pulses thrilling. It was a tall, slender figure, clad in black, with something thrown over one arm. With long, swinging strides it came towards her as she stood, transfixed, like one who waits the stroke of Fate. Nearer, nearer, it came, and paused. "Alison, Alison!" Ah, only eyes which had waited for his coming all these lonely years could have recognized in this pallid, care-worn, grey-faced man the bright, daring, resolute youth who had gone out from the homestead years ago, to face an unknown world and fight his way to the front. This man's dark hair was streaked with grey; the face was haggard, the tall

form wasted ; the trembling, nervous hand which caught her own, mere skin and bone.

"Oh, Alison, lad, why didn't you warn us you were comin'?" she cried hysterically. "Oh dear, dear, it's welcome you are, welcome a thousand times, warning or no warning," and she held his hands, her eyes upon his face. Gently, very gently, he bent forward, and put his lips to her cheek.

"Dear, true Jennie," he said, "I expected this. I knew you would welcome me if there was no one else in the wide world who cared whether I went or came."

"I am right glad to see you," she replied, her sober face crimsoned by his light kiss. "I ever said you'd come back to us some time ; and it's great trouble you have had ; and right sorry I was for you. 'Deed I was, Alison. Vexed to the heart."

He grew, if possible, more ghastly than before. "Ah," he said, drawing a shivering breath, "we'll not speak of it, dear. Not yet. I'll tell you all some day."

"Well, come your ways in to the house," she said, an unfamiliar sense of dread falling upon her. "It's right glad aunty 'll be. Oh, she has grown old since you were here ; and Uncle Joe, he died a year back, Sunday was eight days."

The old familiar forms of speech did not jar on his ears now. They rather conveyed a sense of rest and refreshment to the spirit which had travelled by devious ways since last they echoed there.

Side by side, not talking much—for a vague and unaccountable awe had come upon Jennie's soul ; a feeling that some unknown power was at her side and overshadowing her made the strong, self-contained woman conscious that she possessed nerves, and the man was busy with the past—they walked up the rough path and gained the gravel sweep in front of the house. "Nothing changed," he said ; "I do not miss a flower or a beehive."

"There wasn't much to change," she replied simply. "We are not changed." Still the same vague sense of something hanging over her and troubling her, still the rising sobs in her throat and that unwonted throbbing at her heart ; she wanted to get away to her room and fling herself down to cry, cry as she had never cried since she had seen Alison go down the road to the railway station and pass out of her sight, as he had

passed out of her life, years ago. He stood on the threshold now, looking round with haggard eyes.

"So little changed," he repeated. "And I——" again that shiver in his voice, again that spasm of agony upon his face.

"Dear heart," she said, "it isn't well you are, Alison."

"I—I have been ill, and ill where there was not one to look after me," he replied. "I thought the end of it all was come, but I wanted to live until I could see you once again; I got my wish, you see," and he laughed, but there was something in his mirth sadder than tears.

"Come in," she said hastily. "Auntie 'll wonder what's keepin' me."

It was all so familiar, the bare, close room, with that hard face looking at him from the self-same corner as of old. Could it be possible he was a college lad once more, returning from his week of work to rest at the farm and woo his cousin Jennie? Oh God, if it were possible, and all the tragedy of his life only a fever dream! He passed his thin hand over his grizzled hair and groaned. Alas! the past was no phantasy of a sick brain, but a ghastly reality, a haunting horror, from which he could never be free.

"I only arrived from America this morning," he told the old woman, whose deafness had increased since he had seen her last. "I caught fever in the States, and never thought to see the old place again."

"Fever?" she cried, only catching at one word in his speech. "Lord sakes, lad, is there any fear o' infection?"

He assured her that all dread of that kind was over, and then Jennie left the room, ostensibly to see after his comforts, but in reality to indulge in a hearty cry.

CHAPTER VIII.

THROUGH the sweet September weather Alison remained in the farm, a welcome guest. Jennie was but little altered since the days when he and she wandered over the hillsides and through the woods, lad and lass, dreaming dreams and building castles in the air. But then the man had lived, while the woman only existed. Through what æons of passion had his soul passed since he walked those lonely fields, seeing no wider

horizon before him than the rim of sapphire sea, with the cloud-like "land beyond" resting on the extremity of its line. The woman's prospects were unaltered, but for him all heaven and hell were in the gulf separating those days from these. As the weeks stole by the consciousness of this grew more and more strongly developed in him, until here, as elsewhere, the very fact of existence became a weary pain; and mingled with the pain a vague trouble, at which at first he could only smile, took shape and form.

"What na' kind o' life is the lad Alison leevin'?" inquired old Mrs. Farquason of her niece one day, when the man had been a month under the roof of the woman who loved him well, for all that his real self was a sealed book to her. "It's idlin' his time he is, an' him to be such a thorough-goin' lad. Is it danderin' after you he is, Jennie? He may as well speak out an' be done wi' it. His wife's goin' on for two years in her grave——"

Jennie flushed painfully. Poor girl—blushes were not becoming to her. "Alison isn't for marryin' me or any one else," she answered. "He'll not think of another woman."

"Houts, touts, it's little you girls know the ways of men. Of course he'll marry—what else?—but if it isn't marriage he's on for he has no business stoppin' here."

The brick-dust red flew to Jennie's brow. "Aunt," she said firmly, "he is welcome to remain here as long as he likes. I don't want to have a cross word with you, but it's my own house, and he'll have a home in it as long as he likes. An' I let no one question him, one way or another." Her voice had grown strangely firm and commanding as she spoke; the old woman looked at her over her spectacles and quailed.

"I'm sure I never was one to interfere," she said, awed in spite of herself. "Go your ain gait, wean; ye wor still a headstrong an' a wilful, but don't blame me if ye come to sup sorrow. I'll pass no words wi' Alison, but I'll just drop a hint to the church minister that it's waste o' time for him to be comin' here o' a night."

"You are free to say what you like, aunt; but I'd be loath to lose Mr. Grant for a friend," Jennie replied.

At the same moment Alison was wandering aimlessly through the fields on the slope behind the house. Life was just as

intolerable to him as it had been in the wild lands of the Far West; as much of a prolonged agony as it was in the great city, to which he would never return. He was not rich, as men call riches in the big world, but he had enough to live upon here in the lonely glens—that is to say, enough to last his time. He knew the seeds of death were in him—knew himself doomed—but it was not that knowledge which made him clutch the falling bar of the rude gate against which he leant, or sink his head upon it with a shuddering groan.

"'Tis tired you are, Master Alison?" The voice was that of an old farm-servant who had often nursed him on his knee in the happy past. The old fellow was trudging home, laden with a pail of butter-milk and a basket of greenstuff from the garden below.

He started and looked up. "Yes, I am tired," he replied hastily; "I have not been just myself since that fever."

"Ah weel, you'll be quare an' mended by the time you have the new mistress to look after ye," the old chap said with a knowing look. "She's a good one, so she is. I allow yez won't be having the weddin' till Christmas, when the work is slack. It's a good holidai' yez 'll be givin' uz?"

Alison looked angrily at the old man. "What put such an idea into your head?" he asked hastily. "There is nothing of the kind."

"Well, if there isn't, it's mighty quare. Sure doesn't all the town know it was waitin' on you she was ever sin' she was a wee runnin' lass? Didn't she all as one say so herself, whin she wouldn't draw up wi' the church minister that kem courtin' here last ha'rist? Sure every one has it laid down that he'll be called to say the words for her an' you, an' a bitter job it 'll be to him, for t'was her he wanted, an' not the farms o' lan'."

"Miss Roe has not the slightest intention of marrying me," Alison retorted hotly. "You may contradict the tale wherever you hear it."

The old man made a face. "No offence," he said. "Sure many a time I whacked you when you wouldn't be at peace an' quit makin' b'leve the sheep's legs wor bruck, an' you not the height o' me knee. I'm sayin'," and he drew near the man, laying a rusty finger on his nose, "it's yoursel' has no notion o' marryin' Miss Jennie, for Lord! she's been in the notion o' ye this twenty year, ho! ho! ho!"

And the old fellow hobbled away. For a full hour the wretched man stood by the gate, gazing at the lovely landscape in the fading light, and wrestling hard with his troubled soul. Jennie loved him. How long had he known that fact? So long that there never was an hour of his life in which he had not been conscious of it. Was he dealing fairly with a tender, loyal heart? Has any man the right to trade upon a woman's affection? Had he not enough misery upon his doomed head without adding to it the consciousness that he was torturing this faithful heart? While the scene before him faded into the twilight of an October evening, he debated the question with himself, shuddering away from the thoughts of what he had to tell her before he dared ask her to be a comfort to the remnant of that life which he had ruined.

Shivering, but not from cold, he betook himself back to the house. Much to his annoyance, there was a guest in the small circle—that church minister of whom Sandy M'Gloyne had spoken. There was nothing about the man to which he could take exception; he was a kindly soul, overmuch tainted with the narrow Puritanism of the North of Ireland, but otherwise of some culture and intelligence. Upon previous occasions Alison had rather enjoyed his company, but now he felt him decidedly in the way. It was too late when the guest departed to have the dreaded interview with this loyal woman, who had loved him all her life. There was another difficulty in the farmhouse; Mrs. Farquason pervaded every part of it. It was only by drawing Jennie out of doors that he could secure her to himself, and in this uncertain autumnal weather, it was hard to find an hour of sunshine, and the days grew wild and gusty, with cold mists from the sea rolling up the glen in damp, chilling billows; it seemed as if Nature was conspiring against him.

"Will you come for a walk, Jennie?"

The skies were clearer; there had been a touch of frost during the night, and a misty autumnal sun lay low upon the hills. The duties of the day were over, and Jennie was free for a while.

Side by side they went down the rough path to the wilder portion of the glen, beyond the little churchyard, where his mother lay sleeping and where a tangle of woodland went straggling up the hills, until it met the wide stretch of heathery wold on their crests.

From the heights far above them a stream came dancing down the hill side, dividing as it quitted the heights, one branch flowing to water Jennie's farm and to do menial work at Jennie's flax-mill; but another and a wilder dash of water came springing from rock to rock, until with one final plunge of about twenty feet it leaped into a dusky pool, just behind the church; it was a pretty spot—wild and lonely. Few denizens of the glen cared for natural beauties; a stream was useful to turn mills and wash sheep, and a pool sometimes had sea trout in it, otherwise, the good people left it alone. The woods, therefore, lay in solitude as those two passed silently along the path, pausing beneath the fall, where tall larches, just turned to gold, stood sentinel above a wide limestone slab, where they had often sat together, lad and lass, to dream dreams which were coming true—at last!

"Can you guess why I brought you here?" he said, with a faint echo of old times in his tone. It was not in nature for her to do anything but sway towards him as they stood. All these years she had hungered to hear him speak thus to her once more. Through the sordid tasks of every day there had always been the hope that at length, in some unknown fashion, by some way which she knew not of, this old dream of her youth might be realized. It was easy for her to tell her aunt that she did not think of marriage, but the old servant knew her better when he said that for twenty years the hope of being Alison's wife had been the secret spring of her life. She did not look at him, but the hand he held nestled closer in his clasp. "I brought you here," his tone was harder—she held her breath, "to tell you the dark story of my past, those years which you know not of, and to abide your judgment, because the rest of my broken life is yours, Jennie." He seated himself upon a ledge of rock and drew her to his side. She sat still, her eyes upon the deep, dark pool, her hand in his. "I must tell the story, straight through," he said, but first he put his hand into the breast of his coat and drew out a brown morocco case. "These are for you, dear," he said gently. "If you choose to wear them, or sell them, they are yours to do with them what you will. They represent a fairly large sum, not half what I gave for them, of course, but still enough to add a trifle to your fortune, my dear girl, and I have left you all I possess besides." The case opened in her hands. In her simple life she had never beheld anything approaching them in

magnificence. There they lay, the diamonds belonging to that mysterious wife whose name she had never heard, stars, rings, brooches, circlets for arms which had never toiled bare above the elbow in the butter-tubs, and rings which were not suited to hands red with honest toil.

"Oh, Alison," she gasped, "they're far too good for me."

He smiled a pale, faint smile. "Nothing is too good for you, Jennie," he said. "You can do what you like with them; wear them, or sell them, just as you please. She scarcely thanked me for them."

"She must have been quare then," said the sturdy Ulster woman.

He winced. "Listen to what I have to tell," he said. "I do not ask you for more than a patient hearing. Afterwards——" he caught his breath. What could he expect from her afterwards? Very slowly, but with a quiet emphasis which compelled her to listen, he told her his story from first to last, pausing when he reached the end as if to gather strength. "I was mad," he said; "mad—there can be no other excuse for me—but I determined that she should not go from me with her secret hidden. I knew I had power to make her obey my will, and as she lay there, beautiful as a dream, I threw all the force of my being into the command that she should speak; that from her own lips I must hear the story of her life. It was a demon from Hell who prompted the desire. Slowly, in her mother's tongue, she told the tale, speaking of 'this poor Louise' as if she had played the part of a looker-on through it all. She was the daughter of an English nobleman, her mother being a French actress, renowned in her day. The father had placed his child in charge of some good nuns, removing her altogether out of the woman's reach, with the avowed intention of acknowledging her as his daughter. Just as she came to be sixteen he was killed in a railway accident, and the mother claimed her. She was beautiful and gifted, and the woman wanted her. The actress brought that fair, pure child into the veriest hot-bed of vice in the most vicious city in the world. She was innocent as an angel, but knowledge was forced upon her," he paused to wipe the dew of agony from his brow, the breath rattled in his throat. "Amongst the men who frequented the accursed house there was one not as yet utterly debased. He was brother of that Count Martis at whose house I saw her first. She loved him, he

was rich enough, but there was another, a Russian, occupying a high position under Government, and Martis' superior in office. Her mother—Jenny, I cannot tell you this part of it. Enough that she fled out of her mother's house for safety, and was found by Martis wandering alone in the awful cold of a winter's night in St. Petersburg. He took her home," again he paused, and again compelled himself to go on; "for two years they were happy, and then he became involved in some plot, or, rather, was accused of it, because his superior in office hated him. There is not much justice in hate. Martis was banished to Siberia, but the woman who loved him followed him into his living death. Do you think that hate which had failed to part those two was content it should be so? One day they took him from her and shot him before her eyes. For a while she was mad, and in mercy they let her return to the house where she had been happy. There Otto Martis found her, and brought her to his mother, who dealt with her as a daughter. I heard it all, Jennie; listened to every word, knowing the picture she held in her hand was that of this dead Stefan Martis, the lover of her youth, the only man who had ever touched her heart. I stooped to draw the fatal thing from her clasp, and an awful thought came upon me: we were parted for ever, why should she not die? I tell you I had not an idea of the merciless power which was in me. I tell you I was mad," he clasped his hands over his face and moaned aloud. "With that wretched thing in my hands I dashed from the room, fearing to look back, shrinking like the murderer that I was from the sight of my crime. I forgot how I got into the streets, but I found myself wandering through the driving sleet and icy mud of the winter night, blind, and dazed with an agony of fear and grief. I did not believe I had strength to work her ill. I was mad. I can only repeat it over again. At length, when the dawn was breaking overhead, I made my way home, to hear that—oh, God! why did I not have power to will my own miserable life away? I ought to have died that day. There was an inquiry. The greatest authorities in London gathered at my request to discover the cause of death, but it was hidden. Syncope, failure of the heart's action, they called it, and were full of commiseration for me, for her murderer. There was one man amongst them who suspected me—I saw it in his eyes—but he held his peace, and the grave closed over the wife whom I

loved too well to let live. I threw up all I had striven for years to attain, and went forth into the world a wanderer. Jennie, I have told you my story and how I must go through life bearing the brand of Cain."

She had risen to her feet and was standing with her face averted. "Your wife was a—a—light woman and convent bred?" she asked.

He looked up surprised. "She was educated in a convent, yes," he replied. "What of that?"

"And she lived with a man who was not her husband?"

"That is a rough way of putting it," he rejoined.

"But it's true?"

"Well, yes, it is true."

"Say no more, Alison," she flamed out. "I was decently reared. I know my duty to my neighbour, learned it out of the scriptures, and it never taught me that a light woman was fit company for—decent people."

"But, Jennie, Jennie, you do not understand," he stammered.

"I don't want to understand. You say it's mad you were, and it's my belief you're mad still; the fever is on you. To think you took a light woman. I thought more of you, Alison," and turning from him she wept sore.

He was overstrained. The pain at his heart grew almost unbearable; his feet were cold as ice. "Jennie," he said gently, "forgive me for grieving you. I have no one else in all the world who cares whether I live or die. I had hoped you would sympathize with me. I was wrong, it appears; but do not turn from me. I have sinned—sinned past the power of forgiveness."

"No, no! I never said that," she cried, wiping her eyes. "There's hope for the worst of sinners."

He uttered a faint, pitiful laugh. "Be it so, Jennie," he said. "Do you be merciful to me; and what there is of my broken life—"

He paused. No, he could not utter the irrevocable words. The still, fair face, with its exquisite refinement of beauty, its deep, wistful eyes, its soft curving lips, rose up before him and held him in its charm.

"Jennie, I am dying," he said. "Be your own pitiful kind self, and give me your answer another day."

The brick-dust red flew to her face. She uttered a faint exclamation.

"Tell your aunt, dear," he said gently. "It will satisfy her; and leave me here a little."

"Oh, Alison! do you mean it?" she gasped, laying her hand on his quivering arm. "Mean that—at last?"

He could not speak, only bent his head, and she knelt before him with the love-light in her tearful eyes.

"I'm not educated enough for you, Alison," she said with a gasp; "but I'll be true to you."

"I know. Leave me now. I'll follow you home soon."

"I'm going; but take care that you don't catch a dose of cold sitting here in the damp," she said very tenderly.

He looked at her with a faint smile, and watched her vanish through the trees, with the fallen leaves rustling round her feet as she went. When she turned the corner, and was lost to view, he sunk on the stone once more and, covering his face with his hands, gave himself up to thought.

He knew full well he would never live to marry her, knew his doom was sealed; but he craved for sympathy, and he craved for love; and then it was but justice to the woman who had spent the best years of her life waiting for him. Hard! She had said hard things of her—of the woman sleeping in that great city cemetery, with the noise of busy London rolling in a torrent close at hand. He was not to lie by her side, even in death. Better so, better because she had not forgiven him—never would forgive him throughout all eternity. He was turning his back on the old life. The name he had made was lost to him. Le Breton and his wife were happy, the husband helped on by the bright, shrewd, tender soul at his side; the wife glorying in the triumphs of her husband. How they had warned him, how kind they had been, but all in vain; for he had thrown everything away for the sake of his wife—that wife who had never been his; she who had not forgiven him, and who would never forgive him through all the cycle of ages that were to come. How would she meet him in that Unknown to which his weary feet were hastening—fast, so fast? He tried to stand upright, but the ground slipped from beneath him. A white mist floated before his darkening eyes, and through the whirling vapour looked out upon him the face of the woman he loved.

It was over. The little procession, following the hearse which

contained the last remains of a ruined personality, went jolting down the track to the churchyard, and on the chill evening air came the tolling of a bell, ringing the knell of an ineffectual life—a career broken, wasted, flung away. Jennie stood by the gate and listened, holding back the sobs which arose in her throat. Was the knell not ringing over her own cherished hopes—over the love-dream of her whole life?

"It's good-bye, and good-bye," she thought, and then the sobs had their way. She rested her head upon the damp, cold iron bar and wept unrestrainedly. "He was sorely changed in himself; and I'm not sure he was clear in his mind," she thought. "It would ha' been a long nursing I'd ha' had; but I'd ha' done my duty. Oh, I'd ha' done my duty." She wiped her streaming eyes, listening to the measured beat of sound, as it drifted up the wind, mingling with the lowing of the cows in the wide pasture lands that were all her own. The sense of the nothingness of all the world had to give, compared with what she was burying out of sight for ever, came upon her as she stood, and again her massive frame shook with the vehemence of her grief. "But he'd have expected so much of me," she thought; "and I'm too old to change now. If he had stopped with us and contented himself it would have been far different, and better for him and me. But it's all a tangle, and life's a tangle; and the ways of Providence are past finding out."

She turned away, and moved slowly through the well-stocked haggard, standing amongst the increase of the earth which the Creator had put into her overflowing barns. Yes, the world was going well with her; she had many things for which to be thankful. As she stood the tolling ceased. She clasped her hands, and with streaming eyes found herself breathing a prayer. "Why, if it isn't sheer popery," she cried aloud; "only I wish I believed in it."

Then she returned to the gate and watched. Through the gathering dusk she saw the hearse drive rapidly away. The sight hurt her like a blow, while her tears rained down unchecked. It was all over—the life which had promised fair had gone down into darkness, and human love or pity could reach him no more. She could reach him no more—never, never more. Twilight deepened round her where she stood, and below her in the glen lights began to twinkle here and there, but the light was gone

out of her life for ever ; there would be nothing from henceforth but the weariful monotony of every-day duties and sordid care.

There was a banging of doors, a tramping of feet, the sound of rough, homely voices. The farm servants were trooping back from the churchyard, rather glad than otherwise, because now there was a better chance of having the popular "church minister" for master, his rival being out of the way. Life poured into the familiar channels once again, the work-a-day world was having its swing once more. She shivered as she turned from the darkening landscape, lagging up the path to the house with reluctant feet. On the threshold she paused, a wave of strong feeling surging up within her, overwhelming her with passionate regret.

"Oh, Alison!" she sobbed. "Oh, Alison, Alison!"

She rested her head against the door until her paroxysm of grief spent itself, then she lifted the latch and went into the warmth of her comfortable home, while without the darkness fell.

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